

Operation OVERLORD

*The sea-borne invasion of
North West Europe, 1944-45*

History of the work of the
Army Postal Service in
relation to OVERLORD

Brigadier K S Holmes CB CBE



Operational Record

The sea-borne invasion of North West Europe

1944-45

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by

Brigadier K S Holmes CB CBE

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Illustrations

The *cover* depicts the signs of 21 Army Group and of some of the Formations which took part in Operation OVERLORD. Because of the limitation of printing the cover in two colours, some of the signs are not reproduced in their true shades.

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FOREWORD

OVERLORD - the seaborne invasion of North West Europe - was the biggest and most difficult military operation ever launched from these shores against a hostile shore.

A far greater planning effort went into OVERLORD than has ever before been put into a British military operation. Militarily and postally the operation was executed very nearly as planned. Public interest in it is still well sustained. Books about it continue to be produced at a remarkable rate. For these reasons more space has been devoted to it than to any other set of operations in the history of the Royal Engineers (Postal and Courier).

The following account of the arrangements made for the provision of postal services for the British, Canadian, and Allied Forces who took part in the invasion of North West Europe has been written with two objects in view:

First, to preserve for posterity an accurate account of those arrangements in some detail, and

Second, to make that account as interesting as possible for the casual reader.

These objects tend at times to be incompatible. Quite a lot of detailed information has therefore been relegated to appendices. Some of these appendices may not be of great interest except for the research worker or to those who were directly concerned in the operation. But to omit them would be to leave the story only half complete with a lot of information lost for ever.

There are not a few references to officers who were responsible for various aspects of the campaign by name. The author makes no apology for this. The individuals concerned came from many different levels of the Post Office hierarchy. After the war some of them rose to the top levels of the Post Office administration. Irrespective of their origins they showed themselves generally to be a good match for their counterparts in other arms and to have a flair for organisation with few parallels.

In innumerable instances the responsibility for provision of efficient postal services for the fighting and administrative troops rested squarely upon the shoulders of men who, in civil life, worked as counter officers, sorting clerks, telegraphists, or postmen. Almost without exception they discharged that responsibility in a manner beyond praise, working exceptionally long hours with few breaks and coping with unexpected situations with commendable resource and aplomb.

The author is indebted to all those who contributed information about particular aspects of the campaign; to those who read his manuscript and made valuable suggestions for improvement; and in particular to Mr P Scarisbrick, MBE, who saved him from errors of fact and judgement. Finally, he is indebted to Col J W Bridge, the Commandant of Home Postal Depot RE and, through him, to his personal staff, for the invaluable help which they gave with the typing and retyping of the text.

CHAPTER 1

IN DEFEAT - TRAINING FOR VICTORY

The last British ship sailed from Dunkirk just before dawn on 4th June 1940. Three weeks later, the Franco-German Armistice was signed and, with it, so Hitler declared, Britain had been "driven from the Continent for ever". At the time, this assertion might have been regarded by a dispassionate observer as incontestable.

Nearly 340,000 Allied troops had been lifted from the Dunkirk beaches - two thirds of them British. A far-sighted Churchill declared that "the nucleus and structure upon which alone Britain could build her armies of the future" had been saved. But they left behind them virtually all their arms and equipment except those weapons they carried home on their shoulders.

At the end of June 1940, the Order of Battle of the Home Forces showed 27 Divisions and 14 Independent Brigades. But of these Divisions, less than half were trained and had tasted battle in France. The rest were equipped for training but, with four or five exceptions, were quite unprepared for action. Some were only just learning to shoot. As for the postal units serving with these formations, it can scarcely be said that they were in much better plight.

Four years were to elapse before British Forces set out for France again with the intention of staying there. In those four years the disorganised and dispirited forces which had been lifted from the beaches of Dunkirk were re-equipped, augmented, trained, and the whole transformed into the most efficient fighting machine ever to leave these shores. Intensive training and, in particular, large scale exercises, ranging in the main over southern and eastern England, produced a fighting force not only able to cope, but convinced that it could cope with any situation which might present itself.

In these exercises not only was almost every conceivable battle situation simulated, but every administrative situation too. Thus, while the first-line combat troops were being inducted into a new type of warfare in which armoured formations and rapid movement had a dominant part to play, the administrative services - R.A.S.C., R.A.O.C., R.A.M.C. and, not least, the Army Postal Services - were learning how best to cope with a whole variety of problems thrown up by the new type of warfare.

After Dunkirk the immediate threat was that of invasion. And for the weeks immediately following, time was the most precious element in all Britain. For many weeks after Dunkirk, as Parliament was informed by Churchill in secret session, an "invading force of 150,000 picked men might have created mortal havoc in our midst". In the event, the threatened invasion failed to materialise since Hitler was unable to obtain that command of the skies and seas which was a pre-requisite

for a successful crossing of the Channel and a landing in southern England. On 2 June 1941 - almost twelve months to the day after Dunkirk - Hitler drove his armies into Russia and the threat of invasion of these islands was removed, at least temporarily, but by no means finally.

In October 1941 as Churchill writes in his book "The Second World War", the British: "were still hard pressed and our only ally, Russia, seemed near to defeat. Nevertheless, I had resolved to prepare for an invasion of the Continent when the tide should turn".

At that time, the prospects of a successful invasion of the Continent seemed altogether remote. But it was clear that if Germany was to be subjugated and the yoke of Nazi rule lifted from the millions of people who lay under it, Allied armies must re-enter the mainland of Europe and fight their way into the heart of Germany. The re-entry operation from the west, using the British Isles as a springboard would, when it came, be known as OVERLORD.

Militarily and postally, OVERLORD was planned almost down to the last detail. The execution of this plan came closer than could, at one time, reasonably be expected.

In one sense it could be said that preparations for OVERLORD began as far back as 1940 after the return of the British Forces from Dunkirk. The preparations fell into three categories - planning for the operation; provision and training of the men required for it; and, thirdly, supply of the equipment and material needed to carry it out. For a long time the main emphasis was to be on training as opposed to planning. And the emphasis in this training was to produce a fighting force fit for total war.

Maximum advantage was taken of the breathing space which followed Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain. By the autumn of 1941, reorganised and re-equipped British Forces, with their Canadian allies alongside, were ready to start large scale manoeuvres, or, as they came to be known exercises. These would not only fit them to defeat an invader - should he ever come - but fit them for action against the enemy wherever he might be met with abroad, or for re-entry into Europe when the time was ripe.

The first of these exercises, known by the codeword BUMPER, was held over the period 29 September to 3 October 1941. It was the biggest ever held in the United Kingdom up to that time. A description of BUMPER will illustrate the type of activity in which the Forces - and the postal units with them - were involved over the next two and a half years. As might be expected, much needed lessons were to emerge from BUMPER and subsequent exercises - lessons which were to be of great importance for the fighting and administrative units, and, not least for the postal units. In the ultimate, these lessons were to help shape the postal as well as the operational planning and final preparations for OVERLORD.

It needs to be stated at this point that in 1941 there were two types of postal address in use by the army in the United Kingdom. Headquarters of formations - Corps, Divisions, Brigades - and units whose title disclosed the name of the formation of which they were part, used the "closed" postal address "Home Forces". Typical examples were - "12 Corps, Home Forces", "HQ 53(W) Division, Home Forces", and "34 Tank Brigade Workshops REME, Home Forces". Headquarters and units using this closed address were served postally by the Army Postal Services. They collected their mail from Field Post Offices and handed over postings to those offices. The use of a place name address was forbidden. So was posting into a civil posting box. Correspondence addressed "Home Forces" posted in the United Kingdom was circulated by GPO sorting offices to one of six Army Postal Distribution Centres (APDCs). These were at Belfast, Edinburgh, Leeds, Crewe, Bristol and London. The APDCs had records kept constantly up to date, showing the current "postal locations" of all Formation Headquarters etc. using the "Home Forces" address, and they despatched correspondence so addressed to the appropriate Field Post Office on the basis of the information in those records.

All other army units - infantry battalions, armoured regiments, engineer field companies, field ambulances, and so on - used a civil postal address, eg "12345 Pte T Snooks, 123 Field Company, RE, Ramsgate, Kent". Mail for individual units was collected from the GPO by the unit post orderlies and postings were put into street posting boxes or handed over to the GPO in bulk.

Of all the mail for the army in the United Kingdom, the greater part bore a civil postal address and was handled exclusively by the GPO.

These arrangements could only apply so long as the army was relatively static. They were quite unsuited to a war of movement. The intention was that in the event of invasion of this country by the Germans, the "Home Forces" address would be brought into general use by all operational units in the United Kingdom. Correspondence for units which, at the time, were using a place name address - the great majority - would be transferred from civil to Army Postal channels. The Army Postal Services alone had the ability to deliver to an army on the move. The transfer was to be made on receipt of the order "Action Stations". Exercise BUMPER provided the Army Postal Services with an opportunity to put to the test their arrangements for servicing the army under conditions of highly mobile warfare.

Militarily the exercise was designed "to practice Commanders and Staffs in the handling of armoured and motorised formations: and to study the mounting of a counter offensive to an invasion". Some 450,000 troops took part. On the one side were the 5th British Corps and the Canadian Corps, with, under command, six Divisions (the 3rd, 4th, and 48th British Infantry Divisions, the 8th British Armoured Division, and the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions) and two British Tank Brigades (the 21st and 25th). These were stationed at the outset of the exercise in Southern Command and represented the "defenders".

On the other side were the 2nd and 11th British Corps, with, under command, four British Infantry Divisions (1st, 43rd, 46th, and 54th) and two British Armoured Divisions (6th and 9th). These represented the "invaders". Postal units were with the various formations on both sides. Their job was to provide a postal service for all the troops taking part in the exercise "under invasion conditions".

Before the exercise could begin, it was necessary to assemble - or, a word of which much will be heard later, to "concentrate" - in Eastern Command the Formations and units which were to comprise the "invading" force. They came from many different parts of the country. The process of concentration took about four days. The majority of the units were using a civilian postal address and arrangements had to be made with the Head Postmasters concerned to redirect their mail from the normal civil locations to the Army Postal Distribution Centre No. 1 (APDC1) in London. Since some hundreds of units were involved this was quite a sizeable operation. No such arrangements were necessary in the case of Formation Headquarters or units using the "Home Forces" address - mail for these was simply re-routed by the Army Postal Service to APDC 1.

Once the exercise had started, the Corps Postal Officers of 2nd and 11th Corps - the invaders - opened up Corps Distribution Offices (CDOs) at a suitable points in their areas and arrangements were made for mail to circulate from APDC 1 to each of these CDOs. The army lorries in which such mail was conveyed were marked with the "neutral" signs so that they might travel from London through "enemy" lines and territory unmolested. The lorries made the journey out and in, once daily. The CDOs were far from static: for example, the 2nd Corps CDO moved from Newmarket to Sandy in Bedfordshire, a distance of some 90 miles overnight.

Delivery of mail from the CDOs was by a variety of methods - generally from the CDO to a Divisional Office and from thence to Field Post Offices serving Brigades. So far as possible, efforts were made to deliver through the medium of the army supply system but in many instances this was by no means satisfactory: some units, for instance, were carrying, in their first line transport, rations for as many as three to five days. Some units' mail went forward to them on petrol lorries and others on ammunition trucks. Irrespective of the methods adopted, one way or another there was no significant failure to get the mail delivered, however spasmodically, to units of the "invading" forces - apart from an "interruption" when the whole of the 11th Corps Postal Unit, 43rd Divisional Postal Unit, and part of 54th Divisional Postal Unit were deemed to be either prisoners of war or killed.

Postal arrangements very similar to those made for the "invading" army were also made for formations and units forming part of the "defending" forces in Southern Command except that there were no pre-exercise concentration moves. But in Southern Command, correspondence normally addressed to a civil address was redirected by Head Postmasters to the Army Postal Distribution Centre, No.2 at Bristol, to which office,

mail addressed "Home Forces" was also circulated.

Mail for troops under command of 5 Corps, and that for 8th Armoured Division and 25th Tank Brigade, went forward from Bristol to a Corps Distribution Office (CDO), a twice daily service by road generally being operated. In the early stages of the exercise, the CDO was at Downton, Salisbury. It finally moved to Newbury, Berks, and was on the point of moving to Thame when the exercise ended.

Much the same postal problems were met with by the "defending" forces as by the "invaders". There had to be a lot of improvisation. The chief difficulty was in getting mail to the armoured formations, whose forward troops were often as much as 40-50 miles ahead of their administrative services. But in one way or another, the postal services were operated with reasonable regularity and, throughout the "battle", mail was delivered to most units and formations once daily. The one serious difficulty met with was that of delivering registered mail to forward troops. They were due to be handed over by the Army Postal Service (APS) to unit postal orderlies on a hand-to-hand basis. In exercise BUMPER this was not possible in a good many cases and, in all, some 2500 registered letters had to be held by the APS until the exercise ended.

That postal arrangements had worked reasonably well, and at least as satisfactorily as those of other services, was due in no small measure to the cooperation and assistance given by Head Postmasters and their staffs in the exercise area and elsewhere. They were invariably helpful on this as on all subsequent occasions when exercises were held.

Some 350 men of the Army Postal Service took part directly in Exercise BUMPER - 14 Officers and 336 Other Ranks (see appendix A for some details of the former which may be of interest to the reader). BUMPER was the first exercise in which the forces involved were organised on an army-against-army scale. The next exercise organised on such a large scale - SPARTAN - was not to take place until March 1943, some 18 months after BUMPER. SPARTAN was designed to test the ability of the army to break out from a bridgehead on an enemy shore. It was of critical importance and more of it will be heard later. In the autumn following SPARTAN, there came the final big exercises - JANTZEN and HARLEQUIN - in which the arrangements for concentrating and embarking the invasion forces were tested.

It should not be thought that the exercises named so far were the only ones in which the Forces in southern and south eastern England were engaged after Dunkirk. In between the major exercises, there were others organised on a smaller scale, in which Brigade was pitted against Brigade, Division against Division, and Corps against Corps. Experiences on these exercises were to live long in the memory of those who took part. Some of the exercises were designed to test the efficiency with which units discharged their primary role under conditions of highly mobile warfare; others were to test the ability of men and units to survive and function in emergency conditions; still others to test the ability of the administrative "tail" of a Formation to defend itself

against enemy attack. In all these exercises, Formation Postal Units took a full part. One Divisional Postal Officer of the time recalls that his unit was in its static location barely long enough to recover from one exercise and prepare for the next. On exercise, units were subjected to about every variety of trial which the wit of man could devise. Not infrequently, vehicles would be required to move in convoy throughout the night, laagering and snatching whatever sleep they could during the day. Sometimes they were on the move more or less continuously for 36-48 hours until men were almost dropping with fatigue. On one exercise, men were required to subsist for close on a fortnight on little more than sardines, biscuits and tea until, despite the ingenuity of the cooks, a stage was reached at which no one ever wanted to see a sardine again. On another - called "NIGHT INTO DAY" - the natural order of things was reversed; reveille was at 7 pm; breakfast at 8 pm; lunch at midnight and so on.

Almost all the exercises were exercises in mobility. Maintaining postal services often became very difficult. Field Post Offices existed more or less exclusively in the backs of 3 ton lorries and were frequently on the move. Getting mail to them from railheads presented no little difficulty. Units, in turn, often found problems in locating and reaching the Field Post Offices where their mail was available, since one or other would, as often as not, be ordered to move before they had made contact. In at least one exercise, units were forbidden to make journeys specially for the collection of mail, in these circumstances, their mail had to be sent forward with rations, ammunition, or whatever else was "going forward" - not a very satisfactory arrangement from the soldier's standpoint since quite a lot of delay could be involved. But constant coping with a variety of situations gradually brought growing skill and confidence, and an ability to cope with every new trick that the 'G' Staff or "the enemy" might devise. There is no doubt that during 1942-43, many postal units were stretched to a greater degree than they were after landing in Normandy. But, this was the intention of the intensive training and the experience so gained, coupled with the intensive planning that went on before D-Day, meant that for many, the job of providing postal services on the far shore became "relatively" simple.

Exercise activity was particularly intense in south eastern England. This is perhaps not surprising since from the Spring of 1941 to August 1942, a forceful and aggressive Commander by the name of Bernard Montgomery was making a name for himself - first as the Commander of 12 Corps and then as GOC South Eastern Command. The Montgomery philosophy was simple - "Total war demands total fitness" was how he expressed it. Seen from below this philosophy emerged in two ways. In the first place, irrespective of the Arm of the Service or the Formation to which a man or unit belonged, they must be able to fight aggressively and, if need be, stand and defend themselves against enemy attack, whether frontal or infiltrating, without looking to others to help them. To that end, each and every man must be thoroughly trained and exercised in the use of his weapons and, at the same time, be not only physically fit but also able to survive and function militarily

under conditions taking him almost to the point of exhaustion. This philosophy applied to units of all arms, and to Headquarters' Staffs too. No one was exempt unless it was on the grounds of illness. For the officers and men of the Postal Units, this philosophy emerged in a day which might start at 0600 hrs or earlier, and include a 5 mile cross country run, or a route march in full kit, or a firing practice on a range, or guard duties, or preparing for the next exercise, and so on - and all the while maintaining a day to day postal service for Formations and Units using the "Home Forces" postal address.

While training and exercises were in progress, the south east of England in particular was by no means free from the attentions of the real enemy. Air Raid alarms were commonplace. Shelling was not excluded: the Field Post Office at Dover was right on target for the heavy guns which regularly lobbed shells over the Straits from the French coast. The 43rd Divisional Postal Unit returned from an exhausting two week exercise to its static location in Canterbury on 1 June 1942 - the very night in which the German Air Force raided the city in force and left its centre a blazing inferno. The premises which housed the Headquarters of the unit received a direct hit from one of the bombs dropped on the city and were totally destroyed. Fortunately, the men of the unit had vacated the premises only minutes before and none of them were hurt. But the unit's records, kit, and equipment, and most of the mens' personal effects went up in smoke. The unit was quickly rehoused. But it was not for long. A few weeks later, the premises to which it had moved were bombed out again in a later Baedeker raid.

March 1943 saw the first large scale exercise since BUMPER to be held on an "army - against - army" scale. Code named SPARTAN, it was held towards the close of a period when shortages of petrol and rubber had restricted training on a major scale. Its importance postally lay in two things. First, it drove home a lesson which had been emerging ever more clearly from the exercises which had preceded it. The comments on SPARTAN made by the Commander-in-Chief (Sir Bernard Paget) included the following:

"On the BRITISH side mails were, in the first instance, drawn direct from the base post office by army and corps postal units by which they were taken direct to administrative areas and delivered to units with rations going forward to units the same day. As the advance progressed a postal roadhead was established near NEWBURY to which mails were delivered by lines of communication transport (four 3-ton lorries). At this point they were drawn by formation postal units. Had the normal procedure of sending forward mail from the base been followed, one or more days would have been lost. This would have been progressively more as the lines of communication became further extended.

It is most important that mails should reach the troops as expeditiously as possible. Where conditions on road lines of communication allow, this can be accomplished by running a special service from the base or railhead to roadhead or field maintenance centre. As the number of vehicles involved is comparatively small they can travel greater

distances each day than normal maintenance convoys. Special arrangements should be made for the relief driver to rest on the vehicle while on the move".

In brief, if the troops were to have the best possible postal service, mails must be moved in transport provided exclusively for that purpose and that transport must move, when and wherever possible, independently of other supplies and not in convoy. In planning for OVERLORD, this concept was to be applied right down to unit level - and with good effect.

On SPARTAN, a system whereby a daily news sheet was delivered to the troops was tried out and, in one of the "opposing armies", delivery was made through Army Postal channels. Again the C-in-C's comments are illuminating:

"The daily news sheet produced by both armies was a popular innovation and was much appreciated. The only criticism was that the men would have appreciated more real war news. Distribution was irregular at first but improved later. The system adopted by the BRITISH Army of delivery through the postal service is probably the best for use on active service. It is essential, if the troops are to receive the paper within a reasonable time, that steps should be taken for the daily issue to be sent forward in time to join supplies being sent to the troops that day. If it follows the normal supply chain, they will be several days out of date before receipt".

When the final plans for OVERLORD came to be drawn up, they provided for copies of newspapers published in the United Kingdom to be delivered to the troops on the far shore through Army Postal channels.

Exercise SPARTAN was followed, in the autumn of 1943, by Exercise JANTZEN and HARLEQUIN. These were designed to test the arrangements for the concentration, marshalling and embarkation of troops, and, finally, for landing on the far shore. Their main value postally lay in the fact that they served to confirm lessons which had emerged from earlier exercises, and in views on policy which were already coming to the point of crystallisation.

In parallel with formation and unit training, some specialised training was also carried out by selected postal personnel. Some of this took place in the early weeks of 1944. Men of 6th Airborne Division Postal Unit, who were to be dropped into Normandy by parachute were sent on special parachute courses at Ringway and, as their Commanding Officer put it, "...came back on top of the world". Postal personnel required for service with the Beach Group detachments, who were to land in Normandy on D Day, had to be taken from the one and only L. of C. Postal Unit in 21 Army Group. They were seconded to their respective Beach Groups in the United Kingdom on the 14 February 1944 and, thereafter, received the intensive military training given to all Beach Group personnel - training designed to fit them to go in on the heels of the assault troops and, if need be, to fight their way ashore alongside

those troops and, thereafter, to defend their sectors on the beaches.

By the turn of the year 1943-44, the long period of formation and unit training, which had gone on almost continuously for the previous 2-2½ years drew to a close. Formations (and their Postal Units) which had been in southern England throughout the period, having little or no direct contact with the real enemy, had, nonetheless, been toughened by the exhausting and exhaustive training they had received in simulated battle conditions. Perhaps most important of all, they had acquired confidence in their ability to make war. And the postal units had acquired confidence in their ability to provide a postal service under the most trying conditions. Postal Officers and their men, in common with those of other Arms, felt they now knew every trick in the book. They were ready for action.

CHAPTER II

EMERGENCE OF THE OPERATIONAL PLAN FOR OVERLORD

Within a month of the fall of France, Churchill set up a Combined Operations Command to prepare the way for an eventual return to the Continent. At the beginning of October 1940, while daylight raids on London still continued, he ordered the Joint Planning Staff to study the possibility of offensive operations in Europe, including the establishment of a bridgehead on the Cherbourg Peninsula.

It was clear however that so long as Britain stood unaided and alone, she could never return to Europe and defeat Germany on the soil of France. The balance of strength was set strongly in Germany's favour. It was a question of numbers, equipment, and, above all, the means of transportation. In fact, as Chester Wilmot pointed out in his classic "The Struggle For Europe":

".....there could be no cross-Channel invasion until a large part of Germany's strength had been drawn off to other fronts; until Britain's army had been reinforced from sources outside the Commonwealth and Empire; and until she had established command of the Atlantic supply routes and of the air over Western Europe".

But with the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941, there came a substantial shift in the balance of strength on the two sides of the Channel: and within a month, Stalin sent Churchill a message urging the prompt creation of a second front in France. There was not the remotest possibility of this request being met at the time. But by December 1941, an outline plan had been prepared in London for the invasion of France in the summer of 1943. In the same month, the Japanese attacked the US fleet at Pearl Harbour, the United States entered into open alliance with Great Britain, and thereafter, all plans and preparations for the eventual invasion of Europe proceeded on an Anglo-American basis.

Two weeks after Pearl Harbour, Churchill and Roosevelt met in Washington and reached agreement on a matter of fundamental importance to the Allied strategy. Notwithstanding the severity of the Japanese onslaught in the Pacific, the defeat of Germany was to be the prime objective. It was felt that once Germany was defeated, Italy would collapse, and the defeat of Japan must follow.

Meanwhile, the Germans were on the outskirts of Leningrad and Moscow and there was a real possibility that the Russian armies might crack before the United States could mobilise its strength. Roosevelt insisted that American troops must be engaged against Germany as early as possible in 1942. But it was not to be. Changing circumstances required that the most pressing tasks for 1942 were to halt the Japanese advance in the Pacific (in order to remove the potential threat to Australia), to safeguard the Middle East with its oil, and to gain command of the sea and notably the Atlantic so that the build up in the UK for a cross

Channel invasion might proceed. By the middle of 1942, the first of these objectives had been substantially achieved: but the second and third were not realised until the late spring of 1943.

Meanwhile, the Americans continued to think in terms of the offensive and April 1942 found General Marshall and President Roosevelt's personal representative, Harry Hopkins, in London arguing "the final blow against Germany must be delivered across the English Channel and eastward through the plains of Western Europe". It was decided to begin preparations for a large scale cross-Channel invasion (styled Operation ROUNDUP) to be launched in the spring of 1943. But the Russians continued to press for a landing in France in 1942 and, under pressure from General Marshall, a plan with the name of SLEDGEHAMMER was in fact drawn up for such a landing. At the beginning of June 1942, the Russian Foreign Minister, Molotov, secured American agreement to the release of a communique which implied that a second front in Europe would be opened in 1942. When this did not happen, public concern on both sides of the Atlantic was widespread and the Russians were able to argue that there had been a breach of faith. Stalin even went so far as to accuse the Western Powers of "being afraid of fighting Germans".

The British felt that a plan like SLEDGEHAMMER could provide no more than a minor diversion and that the operation might become a major disaster. It was finally agreed that SLEDGEHAMMER should not be attempted unless some desperate measures were needed to save the USSR from collapse. That the British view was correct is borne out by the outcome of the Dieppe raid when 5000 Canadians took part and 3369 became casualties. This "reconnaissance in force" proved beyond doubt that no fortified Channel port could be taken by direct assault with the resources available in 1942. It also provided experience which was to save hundreds of allied lives within the next two years.

Regardless of the question of date and feasibility, the build-up of American Forces in Britain for a cross-Channel assault, code-named Operation BOLERO - continued throughout 1942.

At the beginning of November 1942, Allied Forces under the command of the newly emerged, General Eisenhower landed in North Africa. Operation Torch had begun. The American Chiefs of Staff had been very doubtful about invading North Africa, arguing that it might delay the opening of the real Second Front in France. The British, on the other hand, thought that it was an essential prelude to an attack across the Channel. And so it proved to be. Within six months, the Eighth Army driving west from El Alamein had linked up with the Allied Armies moving east from the landing beaches of TORCH, and the German Armies in North Africa had surrendered. The North African campaign produced many dividends for the Allies. By no means least, it "provided an invaluable test for the technique and equipment of amphibious operation" which had to be perfected before there could be any successful attack across the Channel. It also revealed how ill-prepared and ill-trained the Allied Forces really were for such an exacting task. It gave them

and their Commanders experience and confidence which could only be gained by battle conditions which did not over-tax their resources or their skill. It showed that the newly promoted Eisenhower was peculiarly well suited for the role of Allied Supreme Commander, which he was to hold when Europe came to be invaded. And it proved that the Anglo-American command organisation could be welded together and be "inspired by a spirit of unity and common purpose".

In January 1943, a little more than two months after the start of TORCH, Roosevelt and Churchill met at Casablanca to consider the future courses of Allied strategy. Stalin had been invited to join them but he declined saying ,in effect, that he was too busy with the war to leave Russia "even for a day". He went on to say:

"Allow me to express my confidence that the promises about the opening of a Second Front in Europe given by you, Mr. President and by Mr. Churchill in regard to 1942, and in any case in regard to the spring of 1943, will be fulfilled, and that a Second Front in Europe will be actually opened by the joint forces of Great Britain and the United States of America in the spring of next year".

In fact, the Combined Chiefs of Staffs, meeting with the President and the Prime Minister at Casablanca, quickly concluded that a cross Channel invasion could not be launched before the spring of 1944. Many more troops needed to be assembled in Britain, the Battle of the Atlantic had to be won, and command of the air over Europe had to be secured before the invasion could begin, and all the intervening months would be needed to secure these ends. While they were being secured the detailed planning and preparation for the invasion of North West Europe from Britain, soon to be re-named Operation OVERLORD, was to be pressed forward in Britain by an Anglo-American staff working under the direction of Lt-Gen. FE Morgan, who was appointed "Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander(designate)", a title which General Morgan shortened to COSSAC.

A week after Casablanca, Hitler decided to intensify German attacks on Allied shipping and March 1943 marked the peak of the Atlantic battle with 523,000 tons of Allied shipping destroyed. But the same month saw the turn of the tide with new Allied counter measures coming into operation. Sinkings of merchantmen in the Atlantic dropped from 92 in March to 41 in May and 6 in June. Churchill was able to tell the House of Commons that June 1943 "was the best month from every point of view we have ever known in the whole forty-six months of the war". Noting the improvement in the situation at sea, the Anglo-American High Command, meeting at Washington at the end of May (the Trident Conference), decided that the target date for the cross-Channel invasion of France should be 1 May 1944.

In July 1943, Allied Forces under Eisenhower landed in Sicily. The operation went so well that it was decided to invade the Italian mainland. This was notwithstanding the reluctance of the American Chiefs of Staff, who regarded operations in the Mediterranean as little

more than a diversion. A compelling factor in the decision to invade Italy was the news that Mussolini had been driven from office. Unfortunately, with the resources allocated to him, Eisenhower was unable to make any large scale landings before September when the American Fifth Army landed at Salerno, a landing that was very nearly thrown back into the sea. Meanwhile, confronted with Mussolini's downfall, the Germans sent southward into Italy, forces which they had been holding in reserve in Austria and Northern Italy. The Allies were forced to fight their way up Italy inch by inch and a year later had progressed only as far as a line drawn from Pisa to Rimini.

In August 1943, General Morgan presented to Roosevelt and Churchill, meeting at Quebec, the QUADRANT Conference, the COSSAC plan for a landing in Normandy. This was to be made with three seaborne divisions and two airborne brigades in the assault, with two more divisions, pre-loaded in landing craft, for the immediate follow up. The aim would be to obtain a foothold between Caen and Carentan and then to concentrate on the capture of Cherbourg. The COSSAC planners proposed that pending capture and clearance of this port of mines and obstruction the bridgehead should be supplied through two artificial harbours to be prefabricated in England and towed across the Channel.

It was admitted that with the COSSAC plan for invasion, the margin between success and failure would be narrow. The plan was nonetheless adopted by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, who confirmed 1 May 1944 as the target date for the invasion.

It was also agreed at Quebec that, to create a diversion in connection with the Normandy landings, Allied amphibious resources available in the Mediterranean should be used for an invasion of Southern France, a landing to be made in the Toulon-Marseilles area. This was to be known as Operation ANVIL.

Churchill had serious doubts about the COSSAC plans. He argued that the weight of the assault in Normandy should be increased by 25%. The Americans who had to provide the extra shipping needed, would not accept this, arguing that none could be spared from the Pacific operations against the Japanese. They maintained this attitude until December 1943 when, following a conference in Cairo between Roosevelt and Churchill, followed almost immediately by a meeting with Stalin in Teheran, the American Chiefs of Staff agreed to allocate to OVERLORD landing craft for one additional division. On 6 December, the Combined Chiefs of Staff appointed Eisenhower as Supreme Commander for the invasion of Normandy. On the same day, they decided that OVERLORD and ANVIL would be "...the supreme operations for 1944; that they must be carried out during May 1944; and that nothing must be undertaken in any part of the world which hazards the success of these two operations". Eisenhower's task was defined thus:

"You will enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with other Allied Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces".

The key problem for the planners at COSSAC was, of course, this: precisely where to attack? While the Nazis held 3000 miles of coast in Western Europe, the area of possible attack by an invading force from the UK narrowed itself down to the 300 mile stretch between Flushing and Cherbourg, since this was the only sector which could be adequately covered by fighter aircraft based in the UK. Then again the precise sector which was to be chosen for the assault, had to include harbours capable of handling the enormous build-up which would be needed, and also spacious beaches across which the assault forces could be reinforced while ports were being captured and cleared of mines and other obstacles. These factors, taken together, narrowed the possible sectors for the assault to two - the Pas de Calais between Dunkirk and the mouth of the Seine, and West Normandy between Caen and the Cotentin Peninsula. The former had many obvious advantages for an attacking force - good air support and a quick turn round for shipping - but it also had enormous advantages for the defenders and was the most strongly fortified sector of the French coast. Normandy on the other hand had fewer drawbacks: the Caen sector was relatively weakly held and fortified, and the beaches were very suitable for a seaborne assault. Taking account of all the factors involved, it was decided that the initial assault should take place in the Caen area, the aim being to seize Cherbourg as soon as possible after the initial landings. At the same time, it was decided to carry through a scheme of strategic deception aimed at convincing the German High Command before D-Day that the assault was to come in the Pas de Calais area, and after D-Day that the Normandy landings were a preliminary and diversionary operation intended to draw German reserves away from the Pas de Calais area so that the main Allied attack might be delivered there at a later date, with enhanced prospects of success. This scheme of deception was code-named Operation FORTITUDE and, in the event, all the guile and ingenuity of the British Intelligence services, and the efforts of the Allied Air Forces were devoted to ensuring its success.

The assault phase for OVERLORD was given the code name NEPTUNE and the Caen - Cherbourg area became known as the NEPTUNE area.

The sector for the assault and build up having been decided, there ensued a good deal of argument about the precise frontage on which the assault should be made. The COSSAC planners had made provision for an assault on a frontage of one Corps with three Divisions, three other Corps to land behind as rapidly as possible and to leapfrog through them. The appointment of Eisenhower as Supreme Commander, and of Montgomery as Commander of the British 21 Army Group with operational control over all land forces in the assault phase, led, at the beginning of 1944 to a rapid revision of the COSSAC plan. Montgomery favoured initial landings on the "widest possible front", each Corps to land on its own beach, and to develop its operations from that beach. He also wanted the airborne landings to be much increased in strength. In the event, his views prevailed and the final plan for the NEPTUNE assault, as approved by the Supreme Commander, was briefly this:

The operation was to begin with the dropping of three airborne divisions behind the Atlantic Wall during the night immediately preceding the main invasion from the sea. These divisions, the British 6th dropping in the Orne valley and the American 82nd and 101st dropping at the base of the Cotentin Peninsula, were to secure the flanks of the bridgehead. Their landing was to be followed soon after daybreak by the seaborne assault. For this, the forces involved were to be the First US Army landing north and east of the Vire estuary and the Second British Army landing between Bayeux and Caen. The assault beaches in the British sector were divided into three. These were named from east to west, SWORD, JUNO, AND GOLD respectively. The British and American formations taking part in the initial assault, and the beaches to which they were allocated, are shown as Appendix B.

The immediate task given to the British and American assaulting forces was to form two bridgeheads on D-Day, the British, between the Rivers Vire and Orne, including Isigny, Bayeux and Caen, and the Americans, on the coast of the Cotentin Peninsula, north of the Vire, extending to the line of the Carentan Canal and beyond the River Merderet.

For a variety of reasons, but principally because the shipping and, notably, the landing craft could not be provided in time to meet the augmented scale of assault decided upon in January 1944, it was decided to delay by a month the invasion of Normandy, originally planned for May. The suitable days for the assault in any month were limited by factors of tides and moonlight to three. On May 17 1944, after a special photographic survey had been made of the underwater obstacles on the Normandy beaches, Eisenhower selected Monday, June 5 as the tentative D-Day, the final decision to depend on the weather. The weather for the greater part of May was ideal, but as June came in it deteriorated. By Sunday, the 4th, a storm had developed in the Channel and a 24 hour postponement was ordered. There followed anxious hours for the Supreme Command until quite unexpectedly the weather lifted and it was decided to launch the invasion.



Officers of Royal Engineers
(Postal Section) in
Normandy. Left to right
(standing) Major E W Shepherd,
Capt P Evans, Lt M Ross,
Capt K S Holmes;
(seated) Col W R Roberts and
Lt Col J N Drew

CHAPTER III

POSTAL PLANNING AND PREPARATION FOR OVERLORD

Preparation for the postal plans for the invasion of North West Europe proceeded broadly in parallel with the operational planning. In the early stages, the work was in the hands of the Army Postal Directorate (War Office). But with the formation of HQ Second Army and HQ 21 Army Group, the work devolved largely upon the Postal Branches at those Headquarters. And, as might have been expected by anyone acquainted with the personalities involved, those Branches rapidly began to seize the initiative and to dominate the formation of policy. HQ Second Army was formed on 5 May 1943. In the July following, Lt-Col JN Drew was appointed Assistant Director of Army Postal Services (ADAPS) heading the Postal Branch at that Headquarters. In the November following, he moved to HQ 21 Army Group and Lt-Col CR Smith took over as ADAPS Second Army. On 15 June, HQ Second Army assumed command of 8 and 12 Corps.

On 31 July 1943, HQ 21 Army Group was formed and assumed command of Second Army, 1 Corps, 79 Armoured Division, 54 Infantry Division and 6 Airborne Division, together with certain Allied contingents; First Canadian Army also came under command of 21 Army Group. Postal arrangements for the last named were in the hands of the Canadian Army Postal Services. But, throughout the planning, there was, of necessity, very close liaison and frequent coordinating meetings between the British and Canadian Army Postal Officers at all levels. Relationships between the two were very close and of the most friendly character.

In December 1943, 30 Corps with 50, 51, and 7 Armoured Divisions under command arrived in the UK from Italy and at once came under command of 21 Army Group. Meanwhile, with the formation of HQ 21 Army Group, overall responsibility for postal services within the Army Group was put in the hands of Col WR Roberts (DDAPS) who was recalled from the Middle East for this purpose. Heading the administrative and planning sections of the Postal Branch at HQ 21 Army Group was Lt-Col Drew.

A list of the principal officers, including Allied Officers and officers of the RAF and Royal Navy, who were involved in the postal planning and preparations for OVERLORD, is at Appendix C.

It can truthfully be said that Col. Roberts, with Lt-Cols Drew and Smith, formed a triumvirate which, in a very real sense, dominated and inspired the postal planning for OVERLORD. A basic question to which they addressed themselves, early in the planning, was whether a "closed" (military style) postal address should be adopted by all units of the 21 Army Group prior to their movement to concentration and marshalling areas and thence to the Continent - in other words, well in advance of D-Day. At the time, use of a "closed" address viz. "Home Forces" was confined to Headquarters of Formations and certain units whose titles disclosed the Formation to which they belonged. The great majority of the units used an "open", ie a place name address,

and they were served exclusively by the GPO. If a "closed" address were to be adopted, mail for all the units using that address would have to be handled by the Army Postal Services.

There was an alternative to the exclusive adoption of a "closed" postal address by units while they were in this country. That alternative was to follow past practice and let Formations and units retain their existing form of address until they left for France. On arrival they could adopt whatever form of "theatre" address might be decided upon: "British Expeditionary Force" or "APO 123" or something similar.

The first alternative, viz to give all units a "closed" postal address well in advance of D-Day had certain clear advantages over the second alternative. Adoption of a "closed" address by units while in this country would much improve security by cloaking the movements of those units to concentration and marshalling areas and thence to the Continent. Properly exploited it would also allow the provision of a continuous or near continuous delivery service during the pre D-Day moves within the UK, and on movement overseas. It would give units, including postal units, experience in postal working on an overseas basis before they left this country. Finally, it would minimise disturbances of postal arrangements on movement overseas since there would be no need for units to be bothering about a change of address, or for the soldier to be sending advices of change of address to his relatives and friends at home at a time when he was likely to be much preoccupied with the battle.

Both the operational planners, and the Intelligence staff in 21 Army Group wanted a "closed" address to be adopted well before D-Day if only for security reasons.

In these circumstances, the reader may be forgiven for asking - why the hesitation? Why not put the whole of 21 Army Group on a closed address well before D-Day and have done with it? The trouble was that there were snags - and big ones too. If a "closed" address was to be adopted by 21 Army Group generally, it could take one of two forms. Either the address "Home Forces" could be taken into use by units which were using a civil address, thus making "Home Forces" the address for the whole of 21 Army Group. Or, an address "c/o Army Post Office", or some adaption of it, could be adopted, with or without the addition of a number to distinguish 21 Army Group from other Forces abroad. To adopt either of these styles of address would mean a big addition to the work of the Army Postal Service in the UK. As an illustration of this increase, it should be explained that whereas the approximate number of letters delivered to a single Infantry Division daily was of the order of 10,000, only 1,800 were addressed "Home Forces" and were, therefore, being handled by the Army Postal Services. The rest, just over 8,000 daily for each Division, bore an "open" ie place name address and were being handled by the GPO. The problem of handling the extra work did not lie with the Army Postal Service "in the field" as it were; there were already postal units working with virtually

all Formations in 21 Army Group and all these were at War Establishment strength and equipped to handle a full Formational work load. The main problem lay elsewhere, namely at the collecting/sorting centre(s) to which mail for the "closed" address would be sent by GPO sorting offices. If, for example, the closed address "Home Forces" was to be adopted by the whole of 21 Army Group - the course which was favoured by both the postal and security authorities at HQ 21 Army Group - the work load falling on each of the six APDCs which handled correspondence so addressed would be increased about five-fold. Each would need a roughly proportionate increase in men and accomodation to cope with the additional load. The War Office, on the advice of the DAPS and the ADAPS, GHQ, Home Forces, decided that this was not on. Attention was therefore focussed on the second alternative, namely that of 21 Army Group adopting a closed address in the form "c/o Army Post Office", or some variant of that style of address. If this course was to be followed, correspondence so addressed would have to be circulated by GPO sorting offices to the Home Postal Centre at Nottingham, where it would be sorted and despatched to postal units serving the various 21 Army Group formations in this country and later abroad. Here again, there would be a big increase in the work to be handled by the Army Postal Service, requiring some 600-650 more men at Nottingham to handle it - and this at a time of acute manpower shortage. But the problem of coping with the extra load, big as it was, would at least be limited to one place, Nottingham, and the demands for both extra staff and accomodation would not be so great as if the extra work was to be thrown upon the APDCs - with only one centre instead of six affected, there would be fewer despatches to be made, fewer bags to be sealed, and so on. The Officer Commanding the Home Postal Centre at the time - Col D Ross - made his position quite clear: if he had to take on the extra work the Army must give him the extra men and the extra accomodation to cope with it. Without it, the Home Postal Centre simply could not cope: with it, it could.

There was another snag in using the Home Postal Centre as a collecting and despatching office for mail bearing a "closed" address in the form "c/o Army Post Office" while the Formations and units using that address were still in the UK. The time taken for letters to be delivered would inevitably be increased and the effect would be felt most acutely by those units - the great majority - which were using a civil (place name) address. Under static conditions, letters for units using a place name address posted reasonably early on Day A were, in general, delivered to the unit on Day B, and at worst Day C, since, by and large, they circulated direct from the town of posting to the town of delivery or, if not direct, then via an intermediate office conveniently placed en route. As against this, letters bearing a "closed" address "c/o Army Post Office" would have to circulate exclusively via the Home Postal Centre at Nottingham. The best that could be hoped for - and this in a minority of instances - would be a Day B delivery and in most cases it would be Day C or even Day D. Thus a letter posted in Scotland for a unit in Scotland would have to travel first to Nottingham and then back to Scotland: anything better than Day C or Day D delivery could scarcely be hoped for. For Headquarters and units using the

address "Home Forces" the deterioration in quality of service would not be felt so sharply since letters addressed "Home Forces" already took longer in delivery than those bearing an open (place name) address. It would, nonetheless, be noticeable.

Various ideas for reducing the deterioration were explored - all of them involving some degree of extended use of one or more APDCs - more particularly APDC 1 in London. All were judged by the War Office to be impracticable. The fact had to be faced, and faced squarely, that introduction of a single closed address for 21 Army Group generally would involve a lowering of the quality of service.

This, then, was the rub: and the question was whether the drop in quality of service could be tolerated for the sake of the advantage to be derived from adoption of a closed address by 21 Army Group generally. A pointer to the answer was provided by the exercises which were designed to test the arrangements for moving Formations and units to concentration and marshalling areas and thence overseas. These exercises - first JANTZEN and then HARLEQUIN - were held in the autumn of 1943, and they provided invaluable lessons from an army operational standpoint and, not least, from the postal standpoint.

broadly speaking, the postal arrangements made for these two exercises were such as to throw almost the whole weight of responsibility for organisation of mail delivery services on to units themselves and on to the GPO. The Army Postal Services remained "in the background". Thus, in JANTZEN, units retained their existing civil addresses and correspondence coming to hand for them at their normal locations was due to be redirected by the GPO sorting offices concerned to "Army Posts, Crewe" (ie to APDC 3). Thence it was due to be despatched to the various destinations to which units proceeded during the exercise. In HARLEQUIN, units using a place name address retained that address throughout the exercise. They were due to make arrangements with the Postmasters for their mail to be redirected from their normal to their exercise locations in concentration and marshalling areas. Mail addressed "Home Forces" was rerouted under arrangements made by the Army Postal Services.

The results of all this were far from satisfactory viewed from a postal delivery standpoint. In a searchingly analytical report the ADAPS, Second Army (Lt Col CR Smith), drew attention to the failures by many units to make proper arrangements with the GPO. He pointed out that, as a result, the mail delivery services had been far from satisfactory. Only where a closed address - in this instance "Home Forces" - had been used had the service been anything like what it should be. He recommended that the Army Postal Service should take over the responsibility for providing service to the whole of Second Army before the move to concentration areas, a "closed" address being brought into use for this purpose. He added that in JANTZEN and HARLEQUIN the desired cloak of security on movements of units and formations was breached by the fact that units, perforce, posted in civil posting boxes thus giving away their locations almost overnight.

Some units moved direct from Exercise JANTZEN TO HARLEQUIN and, in their case, the almost complete failure of unit redirection arrangements was so acute as to cause an almost complete loss of service.

The views expressed by the ADAPS, Second Army were strongly reinforced by the DDAPS 21 Army Group (Col WR Roberts) who toured the exercise area and saw for himself what had happened. Reporting to his 'Q' Staff at 21 Army Group Headquarters in November 1943, he made this observation

"I am of the opinion that if efficient mail services are to be organised for an operation of this kind, it is essential for the Army Postal Service to be set up and working in advance of the main concentration for embarkation. In short, I consider that a "Closed" address should be adopted in advance by all the "assault" and immediate "follow up" troops as well as selected formations of the "build up" on a programme directed by 21 Army Group with the approval of the War Office. If this is done, the Postal Units, which are already with the various formations would automatically take over the complete control of the Army Postal Services as the proposed programme developed. By the time that moves to the concentration areas were started the APO machinery would thus be established and mails could be routed and disposed of under the direct control of the Postal Directorate at 21 Army Group....."

The issue was beginning to crystallise notwithstanding the fact that there were still some very powerful currents of opinion flowing in the direction of maintaining the status quo addresswise until units went overseas. Through November, the DDAPS and ADAPS 21 Army Group continued to hammer away at their Headquarters urging the introduction of a "closed" address and a firm decision at an early date on what that address should be. By the beginning of December 1943, opinion both in and outside 21 Army Group in favour of a single "closed" address was virtually solid.

There remained the question of what the address should be. On the 8 December 1943, the DDAPS 21 Army Group minuted his 'Q' Staff and suggested that in the absence of alternative proposals consideration might be given to an address "British Army Post Office, England" to be adopted initially by Formations and units taking part in the assault, follow-up and build-up, and only at a later stage by Army, GHQ, and L of C troops generally.

On 17 December 1943, the War Office decided that a closed address should be put into operation prior to moves to concentration areas despite any deterioration in the quality of the delivery service which might be involved. The form of address would be "c/o Army Post Office". At a meeting on 11 January 1944, it was decided to add "England" to this address in order to ensure that mail for units of 21 Army Group posted abroad was routed to the UK. The form of address as finally promulgated in Orders on 28 March 1944 was "Army Post Office, ENGLAND". The troops shortened this almost overnight to "APO ENGLAND". It had been seen all along that to put 21 Army Group on an address in the style "c/o Army Post Office", while leaving other formations on the address "Home

Forces" would at once disclose the Battle Order of the invasion force. To get round this, it was decided that other Forces and units under the control of the War Office and GHQ Home Forces (including the static staff of the Marshalling Area camps) must be put on the same closed address as 21 Army Group. The address "Home Forces" would then be abolished. There were obvious advantages in following this course, since not only would the Battle Order of 21 Army Group be cloaked, but the plan of deception would be improved. The size of the assault, follow-up and build-up force would appear to enemy intelligence to be bigger than it was; and doubt about the point of landing would be increased. (In the event, the Norwegian Forces in the UK were put on the new closed address leaving the enemy to draw any conclusion he could from that fact).

Putting still more Formations and units on the new closed address posed further problems for the Home Postal Centre. It was finally decided - by the Supreme Commander (SHAEF) - that, come what may, the extra work must be taken on board by the Army Postal Services. In this, the abolition of the "Home Forces" address provided help in that it allowed the APDCs to run down their establishments, the surplus men being transferred to the Home Postal Centre.

Further help was provided by the phased application of the "APO ENGLAND" address to formations and units of 21 Army Group, and by limiting its adoption at the outset to units embarking in the first three weeks of the assault and build-up. The phasing allowed the Home Postal Centre to build up its organisation in stages, rather than at one go as at one time had been feared might happen.

The decision to introduce a single closed address - "APO England" - well before D-Day having been taken in principle, it remained to implement it. On 16 February 1944, a Location Control Group was set up at Headquarters 21 Army Group. In the next two weeks, the Group brought on to "shadow" postal locations all Headquarters and units due to embark in the period D to D+17 - essentially those under command of Second Army. This meant recording, for each of hundreds of units and formation Headquarters, the Field Post Offices in this country from which each would have to collect mail addressed "APO England", as and when the closed address was brought into use. Also recorded was the railhead through which each Field Post Office would receive its mail. Some units were so widely scattered as to preclude their being served through a Field Post Office while in the UK. Such units were "shadow" located on a GPO sorting office.

The process of introducing the new address - "APO England" in accordance with a phased programme, began on 11 April 1944. Prior to the new address being adopted by a formation, all ranks in that formation were, under orders issued by HQ 21 Army Group, informed that:

"...introduction of the closed address will mean the slowing up of Postal Services to units, necessitated by all mails passing through the Home Postal Centre, RE, before distribution. This extra transit time is unavoidable."

Four post-free change of address cards were issued to all ranks, two days prior to introduction of the new address so that correspondents could be notified. Pamphlets containing full postal instructions for units and their Post Orderlies were also issued.

On 11 April 1944, all Headquarters and units in 12 and 30 Corps adopted the new address. All those in 1 and 8 Corps followed. Then the Airborne Divisions; the 79th Armoured Division; and, finally, Second Army Troops, the Artillery Brigades and A.G.R.A.s, and units which would be operating in France along the Lines of Communication. By the first week in May, by far the greater part of Second Army was using the closed address. It had also been taken into use by formations and units not forming part of 21 Army Group, but figuring in the plan of deception. The precise dates on which the closed address was brought into use by the various formations and units are given at Appendix D.

The plans for OVERLORD provided that the 2nd Tactical Air Force (2TAF) would operate in close support of the ground forces in Normandy - 83 Group RAF in support of Second Army and 84 Group RAF in support of First Canadian Army. By arrangement with the Command Postal Officer, 2 TAF, (W/Cdr WJ Shewry) units of 83 and 84 Groups RAF were brought on to "shadow" location and assumed the address "APO England" during May '44 - 83 Group on 15 May, and 84 Group on the 30 May.

Some units of 21 Army Group - generally those not planned to embark in the period D to D + 17 - retained an "open" address for the time being. Headquarters 21 Army Group was a special case. As far back as 19 August 1943, the Headquarters had assumed the semi-closed address "C/O No 1 APDC, London W1", and it retained this address until some time after D Day.

As from the date of introduction of the "APO England" address, location and postal traffic arrangements which up to then had existed only in "shadow" form, became operational. Units which had assumed the closed address got their mail by collecting it from a designated Field Post Office, or, in certain cases, from a designated GPO sorting office. Posting into civil boxes was forbidden. There was one delivery and two despatches of mail from Field Post Offices daily. Registered parcel, COD, Money Order, and Express Delivery services were not available. Telegrams could be sent to the address "APO England". They were routed by accepting offices to the Central Telegraph Office in London where they were referred to a telegram locating section established alongside the Directorate of Army Postal Services in Post Office Headquarters. This section inserted on each telegram the name of the appropriate postal railhead and the messages were then on-routed by the Central Telegraph Office to the GPO Sorting Office at the appropriate railhead town. The Army Postal Officers in control of each railhead supplied the Head Postmaster concerned with the telephone numbers of all units served through the railhead and kept the information up to date. Telegrams were telephoned to units by the civil post office at the railhead.

Overseas postage rates were payable by the general public on mail sent to troops using the address "APO England". Inland postage rates were chargeable on mail from the troops handed into the Field Post Offices for delivery in the United Kingdom. Details of the service and rates are given at Appendix E.

As from 11 April 1944, mail addressed "APO England" began to be circulated by GPO Sorting Offices in separate despatches direct to No. 6 Division at the Home Postal Centre at Nottingham. No. 6 Division, which was established in a requisitioned factory premises dealt exclusively with mail for 21 Army Group. In No. 6 Division, the "APO England" mail was sorted into unit selections, sorting being on the basis of Arms of Service - RASC, RE, REME, RA, - in the first place, and then down to units within the individual Arms of Service. Unit selection having been made, the letters were "bagged off" to the appropriate Field Post Office. The Field Post Office bags were, in their turn, despatched to the appropriate railheads (railway stations). The Home Postal Centre made one despatch daily to each of these railheads, in accordance with a comprehensive scheme agreed with the, then, four mainline Railway Companies. The time of despatch from Nottingham varied according to destination, but generally was between 5 and 5.30 pm. The aim was to have mail so despatched available at Field Post Offices during the following morning. All mail received at Nottingham up to about noon was due to be included in the 5 - 5.30 range of despatches so that, generally, mail posted in GPO boxes on Day A was due to be available at Field Post Offices on the morning of Day C. In the early days, when relatively few units were using the "APO England" address, correspondence was conveyed from Nottingham to the various railheads by special vans attached to ordinary passenger trains. However, very quickly, the volume of mail built up to such an extent that it was necessary to run a special postal train from Nottingham to St Pancras to carry the mail for the formation and units in the south of England. At a later stage, this was replaced by a special train running from Nottingham to Reading and on to Basingstoke with "through" vans for the various destination railheads. Mail for formations and units in the East Anglian area was carried in special rail vans attached to passenger trains leaving Nottingham for Grantham, Cambridge and Ipswich. Some of the details of these special trains are set out in Appendix F. All transfers of Army mails from one train to another at the key stations were carried out by Army Postal personnel.

No. 8 Base Army Post Office, the unit designated for service in Normandy was installed temporarily in premises in London, where it functioned as a "cross-post" concentration office for all Field Post Offices in Eastern, South-Eastern, and Southern Commands, and in London District. Field Post Offices outside those areas sent their cross-post mail either to local GPO Sorting Offices or to Home Postal Centre.

Considering the fears which had been expressed earlier on as to the effect on service which the concentration of mail addressed "APO England" on Nottingham might have, it was remarkable that, in practice,

the new address should have been brought into use with so little disturbance and comment. Credit for this must go to the GPO as well as the Army Postal Services. But it must go, in particular, to the Home Postal Centre who, once they had accepted the "APO England" scheme, organised and operated the sorting and despatching arrangements with great efficiency. The flow of mail for the new address through the Home Postal Centre and thence to formations and units of the gathering invasion forces proceeded smoothly and without incident. The only public complaint of any significance developed in the second half of May. It concerned the rates of postage on parcels addressed to "APO England". These rates were those payable on parcels sent to the Forces overseas and as such were much dearer than those charged on parcels sent to destinations in the UK, ie. on inland parcels. The public generally realised that although overseas postage rates were being charged on mail addressed "APO England", the troops using that address were still in the UK. They did not see why they should have to pay more for their parcels than they had been doing prior to the introduction of the new address. Circumstances being what they were, it was difficult to give a convincing explanation. It was decided that it would be best, on balance, not to make a public statement - as had at one time appeared necessary - but to answer complaints individually, pointing out that, on balance, the rates of postage payable for Forces overseas were more favourable to the public than the inland rates, being 1d less for letters and postcards which constituted the great bulk of the mail. Once the invasion started, complaints about parcel rates ceased.

The decision to introduce the address, "APO England", did not apply to the Canadian and US Forces who took part in the assault on the Continent. The Canadian Forces were already using the address "Canadian Army Overseas", and were served at all times by accompanying units of the Canadian Army Postal Service. Mail posted in Canada, bearing the address "Canadian Army Overseas" was centralised on an Army Postal Concentration Centre in Canada, where it was sorted into unit and formation Headquarters selections. It was forwarded from Canada to the UK in direct unit bags or, if these were not justified by the amount of mail available, in bulk, to the Canadian Overseas Postal Depot, which was established in Manchester. Mail for the Canadian Forces in Normandy was shipped from Southampton. The US Forces used a "US APO number" address. Mail for these Forces which was of US origin was concentrated on an Army Postal Concentration Centre in New York. The Base Post Office for the US Forces in the UK was established at Birmingham. The US Forces in the UK, and later in Normandy, were accompanied at all times by units of the US Army Postal Services. Mail for the US Forces in Normandy was shipped from Plymouth.

While plans for introducing the APO England address were being made and implemented, planning of the postal arrangements for delivery on the far shore was going ahead. Postal plans had to be integrated with operational plans. The problems were unprecedented. Delivery to units was called for to commence on D + 1 in a theatre where the military difficulties were likely to be considerable. A large number of units, independent of the basic formations, would arrive on the far shore

in the very early days. Nearly all units would arrive in "penny-packets" with the additional complication that the arrival of the "packets" making up a unit would be spread over a period of several days, if not longer. The rate of build-up of the Force would be conditioned by both shipping and weather, and it could not be stated with certainty when a given unit fragment would arrive.

The operational plans provided that each of the three sectors - GOLD, JUNO, and SWORD - over which the British assault would go in, would be sub-divided down to beaches. On each of these a group of units, known as a Beach Group was to operate. The function of a Beach Group was to clear the beaches of any remaining enemy and obstacles after the assault troops had moved inland, and to form dumps of supplies. These dumps, as they were built up, were to be built into Beach Maintenance Areas (BMAs). One of the depots in each BMA was to be known as a Detailed Issue Depot (DID) and it was alongside these DIDs that initially the APOs serving the assault Divisions were to be established. The depots in the BMAs were to be quickly expanded into two L of C terminals (later called Army Roadheads) superseding the SUN, STARS and MOON areas. At a later stage, a Rear Maintenance Area (RMA) would be set up in advance of the L of C terminals which would be "eaten down". A more detailed note on the planned organisation of the beaches is shown at Appendix G.

The requirement that delivery on the far shore should begin on D+1 called for two things - first that postal units should be in position on the far shore and ready to open shop on D+1 and, second, that mail for delivery should reach the postal units in time for delivery on D+1. The postal plans provided that postal units - or at least such parts of them as would be needed at the outset - would land with the assault formations, whether airborne, commando, beach group, or divisional, and be ready to start work within a few hours of their arrival. APOs - "S" Offices - were to be established in each of the areas SUN, MOON, and STARS and, in the very early days, were to form the pivots for the whole of the postal organisation. Appendix H1 shows the planned positioning of these APOs in relation to the Beach Maintenance Areas.

Plans for getting mails to the A/FPOs on the far shore were made on the basis that at the outset, all mail - letters and parcels plus newspapers - would be shipped through Southampton and conveyed to the far shore in coasters. The planned daily time of arrival of both mail and newspapers at Southampton was 0600 hrs for a sailing at 1000 hrs. It was intended that the mail should reach the far shore within 12 hours of receipt at Southampton. Shipping space was at a premium. The competing priorities were formidable - men, ammunition, petrol, food, medical supplies, and so on. Mail tonnage were calculated as accurately as they could be, and the space required on the ships was then bid for and allocated on the basis that delivery of letter mail would begin on D+1, and parcel mail and all registered items on D+6. Newspapers were planned to arrive in the bridgehead on D+4. The precise ship loading arrangements were planned on the following basis:

from D+1 to D+4, mail was to be divided in the UK on a Corps basis and consigned to two anchorages, GOLD and JUNO on the far side: 30 Corps to GOLD and 1 Corps to JUNO: after landing, the mail was to be moved to the two BMAs, SUN and STARS:

from D+5 to D+7, mail for the whole of the Force was to be shipped to anchorage GOLD and moved thence to BMA SUN:

From D+7 onwards, mail for the whole force was to be shipped to anchorage GOLD and conveyed thence directly into a Postal Depot which should by then have been opened in No 2 L of C terminal:

The difficulty presented by the planned arrival on the far shore, in the very early stages of the operation, of large numbers of units independent of the basic formations stemmed from a fundamental principle underlying the operational planning. This principle was that where a unit would be required to do a particular job, ultimately, such part of it as was adequate initially would be put in position in the beach-head as soon as possible. The consequence of this was that many Base, L of C, and Army units (or part of them) were planned to land at the same time as the Divisional formations. Such units were too numerous to be served by formation FPOs and they did not have the kind of affiliation with the Field Post Office organisation which Divisional and other formational units had. If the practices of past campaigns had been followed such units would have been left to make their presence in the theatre known to the Army Postal Service, by calling at a A/FPO and asking how they could get their mail. A location message would have been sent by the A/FPO concerned, asking that mail for the unit should be forwarded to that particular A/FPO. A day or two would then elapse before mail arrived. At the best, the unit would not have been able to get mail until D+3 or 4 and probably later. Something better than this was needed. Under this system, every unit due to arrive on the far shore up to D+17 - getting on for some 4000 in all - were, as part of the planning, pre-located on a A/FPO to be opened once the assault began, on the far shore. In other words, it was decided well in advance of D Day, for each of some 4000 units, to which A/FPO that units mail would be sent. Also decided was the stage at which a unit's mail would be diverted overseas. The information required for these two decisions was obtained, in respect of each unit, from the parent Branch at Second Army Headquarters or from the subordinate Headquarters responsible for the unit. These decisions having been taken, each unit was, while still in the UK, informed by letter of two things. First the date (in terms of D+x days) on which its mail would be sent overseas and second, the number of the A/FPO eg S692 to which it should go to get its mail on arrival on the far shore. As regards the former, diversion was arranged to coincide with the arrival on the far shore of the first substantial part of the unit (excluding reconnaissance and advance parties). The unit was told to arrange for its Postal Orderly to travel abroad with that particular part of the unit, and, on arrival on the far shore, to contact the nearest A/FPO, which should be the one it needed. If it were not, that A/FPO would know the location of the one which the unit required and could direct it to that location.

Operational plans called for a further refinement of the pre-location system. Up to D+4, each assaulting Corps was to be entirely responsible for its own sector, after which Second Army would be responsible for the whole theatre until about D+17. HQ Lof C would then take over the rearward areas. It followed from this that there would be a massive reversion of units from Corps to Army control on D+5, and, again from Army to L of C control on D+17 and after. Units of which the control would change in this way would be brought in early to start work in the rearward area and which would remain there after the fighting formations had moved forward. A postal consequence of all this, was that while in the very early days many such units would be physically served from a Field Post Office operated by a Divisional or Corps Postal Unit, they would, as the Army moved forward, taking that Field Post Office with it, then have to revert for a service to an APO in the Rear Maintenance or L of C area. In consequence, large numbers of postal location changes were in prospect at a time when there was likely to be a heavy congestion on the Signals system. To avoid this a system of "phantom" APOs was adopted. Pre-locations on Divisional and Corps FPOs were confined, almost exclusively, to units on the basic Battle Order of those formations. Units independent of the basic formations, but which were to receive service in the early days from these Divisional and Corps FPOs, were pre-located on "phantom" APOs. Thus, whereas units of 1 Corps Troops were located on FPO H1 - the Corps FPO - units using that FPO which were intended to remain in the rearward area when FPO H1 moved forward, were located on a phantom APO S692. Army units whose physical location in the early days was uncertain, were pre-located on a special phantom - S695, being the phantom S Office of Second Army. This was opened from D+3 to D+7 (inclusive) as a phantom with S697, and from D+8 onwards as a phantom of S698. Phantom Offices, together with APOs opened as such in the Beach Maintenance Area at the outset and intended to stay there, all had the prefix "S" meaning "Stationary". A list of "S" APOs is at Appendix H.

A virtue of the pre-location scheme was that it was independent of the speed with which the bridgehead developed. It was designed to cater for the maximum speed and, if that were not realised, then any required number of "S" offices could be served from one physical location without disturbing the machinery for routing the mail.

Once the pre-locations for units had been settled, the information was incorporated in pre-location schedules. Copies of these were sent to the Postal Officers directly concerned and to the Home Postal Centre at Nottingham. The master copies were held by Locations Control at HQ 21 Army Group. All that then remained was to "firm up" the individual locations as units arrived on the far side and "reported in". A detachment of Locations Control 21 Army Group was attached to the Postal Branch at HQ Second Army and proceeded overseas with that Headquarters. The plans provided for Locations Control for the Normandy theatre to open on the far shore on D+3.

Reference has already been made to the fact that for movement overseas, many units were split into "penny-packets" or "serials" as they were

known officially. Many were split into three, four, or five serials but some into as many as twenty. Most units left a residue behind in the UK for some time after the arrival of the main body overseas. The organisation of mail services for these residues presented a particularly difficult problem. It was decided that mail for the whole unit would have to be diverted overseas once any considerable part of the unit had left the Marshalling Area and embarked for the far shore. In practical terms, this was expressed in relation to the movement overseas of a particular Serial of the unit eg Serial 3. Shortly before D Day, "residue" FPOs were set up in the UK in as central a position as possible, to serve all the unit residues of a particular Formation. These FPOs were staffed by Postal Unit residues. The Post Orderly of each unit was instructed (while still in the UK), that, on receipt of mail overseas, he should at once pick out mail for the unit residue in the UK, bundle it, label it with the unit residue name and the appropriate FPO address eg "Army Posts, Salisbury", and repost it. He should continue doing this until seven days before the units "residue" was due to join the main unit abroad when redirection should be discontinued. To keep delay to a minimum, direct mails containing residue correspondence were made up by formation FPOs in the field to the residue FPO serving that formation's residues. A list of the residue FPOs and the formation they served is at Appendix J.

The pre-location scheme as incorporated in the postal plans for OVERLORD was unique. Nothing like it had ever been attempted before. It was fundamentally simple in concept and yet infinitely flexible. The boldness of the concept - providing as it did for a unit landing on a hostile shore to know where to go to get its mail and for that mail to be waiting for it when it called - was highly original. It contrasts strikingly with the arrangements applied in previous campaigns when units had sometimes had to wait for days before they could expect mail to begin to reach them - not infrequently they had had to wait weeks and in some cases even months. And in no previous instance had the Army Postal Services been able to start functioning on the day following a landing on a hostile shore. In essence the pre-location scheme was the brain child of the ADAPS Second Army (Lt.Col. CR Smith). He not only conceived it but won for it the approval of the General Staff at HQ Second Army. He worked it out in detail and in due course successfully directed its implementation. The ability to do the former depended on his having a pretty complete idea of the battle plan which at that time was a top secret and known to only a very few people. The fact that he was allowed to have this knowledge marked the very great distance travelled by the Army Postal Service in status since the beginning of the war.

Perhaps the one decision taken in the planning period which was to matter most to the troops was that which concerned the method of conveying letter mail between the UK and the far shore. The trend of thought at the outset was that in view of the relatively short distances involved the mails should be conveyed in both directions by sea. If there happened to be any space available on the aircraft and it could be used to advantage so be it. But to think in terms of a regular

airmail service seemed to some very difficult to justify, at least in the early stages. And even when the possibility that there might be some demand for an air mail service after the foothold on the continent had been consolidated was admitted, thinking in some quarters was in terms of the conventional air letter and airgraph services with rates of postage applicable to other overseas and much more distant theatres.

Cols. Roberts and Drew had quite different ideas. From the outset they thought in terms of an airlift for letter mail, and although at the time the prospects of getting such an airlift seemed remote, they continued to press their point of view throughout the closing months of 1943. At the turn of the year thinking changed abruptly. Cols. Roberts and Drew were both summoned to see the Commander-in-Chief (General Montgomery) and his MGA (Major-General in charge of Administration). They were asked to supply detailed technical information on the matter of a prospective airlift for letter mail and also for newspapers. It quickly became clear to all concerned that both the Commander-in-Chief and his MGA had decided views on the subject of the troops' mail. There was no doubt in their minds that a quick and regular mail service was, as they expressed it, "the greatest morale factor in an army" and that, so far as 21 Army Group was concerned, there must be airlift for mail as soon as air landing strips could be made available on the far shore. Furthermore, this airlift must be provided "by means of airplanes definitely allotted to the Army Postal Service." Arrangements under which the mail could be "put off" the aircraft if something important or urgent requiring to be transported by air was to hand were simply not good enough. All this was music to the ears of the postal planners in 21 Army Group and Second Army. Of course the concurrence of the "higher authorities" might be required to give effect to the demand of 21 Army Group but it would have been surprising if a requirement to which the Commander-in-Chief attached such importance had not been met. It was met.

If it had not already been clear to the postal planners at HQ 21 Army Group, the experience of previous campaigns would have served to show that a major question to be settled as soon as possible was that of the treatment to be given to letters which for one reason or other could not be delivered as addressed. Letters may be undeliverable as addressed for a variety of reasons. An address may be incomplete or even unintelligible through abbreviation or other causes. The addressee may have been posted to another unit. Or a man may have become a casualty and been evacuated to a hospital or other medical treatment centre. When fighting begins, and casualties are numerous, the number of letters which cannot be delivered as addressed for this reason can rapidly far outstrip the numbers which are undeliverable for all other causes combined. With a force the size of 21 Army Group, the number of letters likely to require redirection or to be given casualty treatment was likely to run into hundreds daily even when there was no fighting: when fighting started it would almost inevitably run into

thousands and at times into tens of thousands. The ever present danger with "casualty" mail is that of a pile-up developing, so producing a situation in which people at home begin to think that their letters to the troops have vanished into thin air. This situation can be productive of much anxiety and bitter complaint. The vital need with "casualty" mail is to stop it hanging about and instead to get it on its way to the addressee or, failing that, back to the sender, with the minimum of delay. So, what was to be done in OVERLORD with letters which could not be delivered as addressed?

In the case of a man posted to another unit the problem was relatively simple. His new unit would generally be known to his old one and letters continuing to reach the latter would simply need to be redirected by the Post Orderly. Instructions were issued that if, for some reason or other, the man's new address was not known, letters coming to hand for him at his old unit should be endorsed "Left.....(unit): address not known" and then reposted for return to the sender.

The real problem was what to do with mail for men who became casualties. The possibility of establishing a Postal Tracing Section to deal with such mail was considered but rejected. Experience in other theatres of war had shown that this system did not work at all well. A Tracing Section could only function by referring to the records of men's movements kept at GHQ 2nd Echelon. There was bound to be a certain lag at 2nd Echelon before the documents of a man who had become a casualty were amended, and when heavy fighting was producing many casualties the lag was bound to become bigger still, and the postal problem correspondingly more acute. When, at last, the records showed which hospital a man was in, and the mail for him was sent off to that hospital, the odds were that by the time it arrived, the man would have been discharged. So, back would go the mail to GHQ 2nd Echelon for further tracing and the whole effect would be like a snowball rolling down hill and getting bigger as it went.

Clinching the argument against the setting up of a Postal Tracing Section was the fact that with the UK in such close proximity to the theatre, men admitted to hospital would be able to notify their new address to their relatives in the UK more quickly than it would be possible to redirect their correspondence through a postal tracing organisation. And, anyway, men who became casualties would in most cases be evacuated quickly to the UK.

Instructions were therefore issued to units that mail for a man who had become a casualty and who had been evacuated to a hospital or other medical centre, should be held - by parent units - for up to 14 days in the hope that a redirection card would be received from the man or from the hospital authorities acting on the man's behalf. In that event the mail should be redirected accordingly. Failing receipt of a card within 14 days, mail for the casualty should be endorsed "Left...

..(unit): address not known", and reposted for return to sender. Hospitals were instructed to pay particular attention to the need for despatch of redirection cards by or on behalf of patients immediately on admission.

The instructions issued to units also provided that mail for men who were known to be killed or missing should be endorsed "Deceased" or "Missing" as the case might be. Special steps were taken to ensure that any such mail was not put in course of post for return to the sender until after the next of kin had been informed of the casualty.

A particular problem arose in the case of Reinforcement Groups. These were essentially holding units from which reinforcements were to be despatched to make good casualties in the forward units. They had to cope one way or another with an immense volume of redirection work. There was a good deal of argument in the planning stage as to how this work should be dealt with. It was finally decided to put with each Reinforcement Group Headquarters a small unit under the command of Sergeant of the Army Postal Services to deal with the redirection work concerned. This was barely enough to meet requirements: but by dint of great exertion the job was done.

As for any other overseas theatre of war, decisions had to be taken at a relatively early stage in the planning as to the mail and telegraph facilities to be provided, and the charges to be made for those facilities, once the troops landed in France. Questions concerning the facilities to be provided at Field Post Office counters also had to be settled. All these issues required consultation between 21 Army Group, the War Office, and the GPO. As regards mail facilities it was decided that the usual letter and parcel post services would be provided and, in particular, that letters up to 2oz in weight from the troops in France to any place in the UK, or in the British Empire, would go free of postage irrespective of whether they were conveyed across the channel by sea or air. In the reverse direction, i.e. from relatives and friends in the UK to the troops in France, the same rates of postage would be charged as on letters and parcels addressed "APO England". Fuller details are at Appendix K.

It was deemed quite impracticable to provide a full telegraph service with transmission all the way by wire. But it was decided nevertheless that telegrams for the UK and other destinations should be accepted at Field Post Offices in France the sender being warned that transmission to the UK would be by post and only thence by wire. Telegrams for the troops in France were also accepted by civil post offices in the UK but, again, while any such messages were sent from the accepting office to London by wire, transmission from that point on was by post. Inland telegraph rates were applied in both directions.

As regards facilities at Field Post Office counters it was decided that, in general, most of the key services which were available to

the troops when in the UK would be made available to them at Field Post Offices on the Continent. Thus, apart from the usual facilities for purchase of stamps, postal orders could be purchased and encashed, Savings Bank business transacted, and so on.

All this required that Field Post Offices on the far shore should be supplied and kept supplied with adequate stocks of cash, postage stamps, postal orders, forms, and all other requisite items of postal equipment as from the word 'go'. Meeting this requirement would present no difficulty once the Base Accounts Section, with its bulk supplies of stamps and other articles had landed and established itself in Normandy. But that could not take place until sometime after D Day and meanwhile, the demand could well be such as to create a situation in which Field Post Offices were stripped of supplies. It was decided that the Field Post Offices at Headquarters of Second Army, Corps, Divisions, and Brigades, should take with them into the theatre double the stocks which they would normally carry. So would the Army Post Offices with the Beach Groups and in their case a proviso was added that their stocks would be replenished if need be by formation postal units landing and passing through the Beach Maintenance Areas.

Stocks of stamps, postal orders, and so on are normally carried by Field and Army Post Offices in deed boxes in unit transport. With the Airborne Divisional Postal Units scheduled to land with their formations ahead of the assaulting ground troops this was impossible. Men of the Airborne Divisional Postal unit took their stock of stamps with them - on the person, strapped to the chest. So did the postal personnel attached to the various Beach Groups.

Early in the planning period high level consideration was given to the manner in which the troops in the theatre might best be kept au fait with events on the home front, and with world news generally. The Army Education Service sponsored the issue by formations of a daily broadsheet based on BBC broadcasts. It was obvious however that such broadsheets could do little more than keep readers informed on home and other news in the most sketchy sort of way: and one result would be to stimulate the demand for fuller information such as that provided by newspapers. Production of a special 21 Army Group newspaper was considered. The idea was, however, rejected. Instead it was decided to make a free issue to the troops in Normandy of copies of the National Dailies. The question which then arose was how to get the National Dailies delivered to the troops. Various methods were considered including delivery through RASC or Signals channels. To be of any value rapid delivery was essential and the only service which it was finally decided could meet this requirement was that of the Army Postal Service. This conclusion was borne out by the experience with delivery of an army "newspaper" on Exercise SPARTAN as far back as March 1943. While the correctness of the conclusion could not be gainsaid, the additional responsibility now to be put upon it was accepted by the Army Postal Services with some reluctance: it was felt that the problems facing

the service were formidable enough in themselves without adding to them. In taking on the commitment the APS made one stipulation, namely, that whatever distribution scheme was adopted it must be of the simplest possible character and free from all refinements such as might subsequently be urged upon it by interested parties. This stipulation was accepted. Plans were then drawn up by the Postal Branch, 21 Army Group, in conjunction with the Welfare Branches and the NAAFI. The manner in which these plans were operated in practice is described in a later chapter.

The 21st Army Group comprised First Canadian Army as well as Second British Army. Throughout the planning period close liaison had to be maintained with the Canadian Army Postal Authorities and the whole of the planning done with an eye to both British and Canadian requirements. So far as the differing considerations permitted the two services were planned to work as though they were one entity. Some time before D Day the Postal Branch of what was known as "Canadian Section GHQ 1 Echelon, 21 Army Group", joined the Postal Directorate of 21 Army Group so that the closest possible liaison could be maintained.

Such close liaison with the US Army Postal authorities was not so essential. But on all questions affecting the two services the fullest discussion took place and mutually agreed plans were drawn up prior to D Day.

More than a few problems presented themselves, and had to be resolved, in relation to the postal requirements of the Allied Formations which were under the command of 21 Army Group - Dutch, Belgian, Polish, and Czech. With the exception of the Poles they had no experience of Army Postal work in the field. Postal Units comprised of Allied personnel had to be formed for service with each contingent. The personnel of these units had then to be trained, equipped, supplied with postal stocks, and educated in British methods of working and accounting. In the event the training given in the UK proved to have been both thorough and effective and little difficulty was experienced by the Allied units after they had landed on the Continent.

Quite apart from the major aspects of the planning which have already been referred to, innumerable other matters had to be dealt with well before D Day. Postal Standing Orders, Accounting Instructions, Booklets for Units, Instructions for Post Orderlies, and many other orders and publications had to be drafted, printed, and distributed. A host of questions connected with the censorship of mail had to be ventilated and settled. As might be expected these were the subject of prolonged discussion with the Censorship authorities.

Briefings, conferences, committee meetings, and consultations with individuals, were the staple diet of each day. From each meeting there

usually flowed a requirement for action of some sort or other, whether it was the submission of a report to higher authority, the issue of orders to subordinate formations, or a call for information on which action could be based. Urgency was the underlying imperative and in all things it was generally a matter of "action this day". Surrounding all things was the over-riding need for secrecy and for its preservation at all costs. This requirement was unusually onerous so far as the postal Branches were concerned since it was through the channels of the postal location system that there flowed information so comprehensive and up-to-date as to be of exceptional sensitivity.

As D Day approached there loomed ever larger the problem of the measures which might need to be taken to provide service to "briefed" Formations and units in the event of a postponement of the day fixed for the assault. Broadly speaking the contingency plans provided that for a day-to-day postponement of up to 4 days such attempts as were feasible would be made to deliver mail to units split into ship loads: but where delivery was impossible the mail would be held temporarily by the Army Postal Services. If the postponement was beyond 4 and up to 14 days, with units still in ship-loads, mail would be delivered to unit headquarters for distribution under unit arrangements. In the event of a 28 day postponement mail would be delivered under the same arrangements as applied during concentration. Posted mail would be accepted at all times subject to unit and Base censorship. One thing is certain, had there been a prolonged postponement of the assault, the security and censorship problems thrown up would have been immense. It was fortunate for everyone concerned that in the event postponement was minimal.

By about mid-May '44, almost all that could be done in the way of planning and preparations for the landing in Normandy had been done. The final postal instructions had been issued to units and the last conferences and postal briefing sessions held, all, of course, at this stage on a "need to know" basis and no more. Meanwhile the vast military machine which was shortly to be launched against the Fortress of Europe had begun to move. Concentration and marshalling of the assault forces was under way.

At the beginning of 1944 the Formations and units which were to take part in the assault on the Continent were mostly at their normal stations. They had first to be brought together as formational entities into prescribed areas as a preliminary to movement abroad - a process known as concentration. The move from normal stations to concentration areas was ordered by issue of the code word CORNELIUS.

Immediately before moving to concentration areas, units were ordered to draw all the stores needed to put them on a war footing and to make them ready for service overseas. Apart from military equipment, items to be drawn included supplies of Field Service Postcards, Redirection cards, and Green envelopes, all three for use on arrival overseas.

Concentration Areas for the seaborne forces stretched from East Anglia to Cornwall and the Bristol Channel. The airborne forces which were to land in France before the seaborne assault started were concentrated close to the airfield in the Bulford/Newbury area from which they would take off.

From their concentration areas the formations and units which were to take part in the seaborne assault were brought forward in assigned priority order to Marshalling Areas generally within 10 to 15 miles or so of the appropriate embarkation points on the coast. For many formations and units Marshalling Areas also acted as Concentration Areas.

Each Marshalling Area was split into about 8-10 sub-areas or Camps. The Marshalling Areas were so designed as to provide formations and units passing through with a complete "hotel" service so leaving them free to proceed with their final preparations for movement overseas. These preparations included "packing-up"; waterproofing of vehicles to enable them to drive aboard landing craft, and then ashore, under their own power through several feet of water; and a host of other tasks. Finally, it was in these camps that the troops were "briefed", that is given their individual orders for the assault, right down to the last detail. They were told precisely where they would land, and what they were to do on landing. The orders were illustrated by detailed maps, scale models, and photographs showing exactly what the troops could expect to see when they landed. Once briefed no one was permitted to leave the Marshalling Area Camps.

In the Camps units were divided into Serials - that is detachments - corresponding to the shiploads in which they were to be embarked.

The fact that over 20,000 vehicles and 176,000 men, along with many thousands of tons of equipment, ammunition, stores, and the like, had to be shipped and landed on the far shore in the first two days of the assault gives some idea of the size of the task which had to be carried through in the Marshalling Areas.

In all, there were eleven such Marshalling Areas. They were strung out across the southern half of the country as follows:

Great Yarmouth	Folkestone
Harwich/Ipswich	Hastings
London Docks	Seaford/Newhaven/Brighton
Tilbury	Portsmouth
Rochester/Chatham	Southampton/Lymington
Dover	

They were staffed by static staffs varying in size from about 3000 men in the smallest area to about 5000 in the largest. Each Marshalling Area, with its related Embarkation Area, had a distinctive serial letter

in its title, and each camp in that Area had an independent serial number. As from the 17th April 1944 the static staffs of the Marshalling areas and camps adopted a closed address in the form "Camp T.8., APO England". The use of the civil post was strictly forbidden. A Field Post Office was established at each Marshalling Area Headquarters. It was put there primarily to provide facilities for the static staffs of the camps. There was doubt whether formations and units in transit would be in the camps long enough to allow for any kind of service being given beyond facilities for posting and purchase of stamps, etc. In practice a demand for as full a service as could be given quickly made itself felt and the Army Postal Services at once set out to meet it. Where necessary a second Field Post Office was established in the Marshalling Area to give relief to the first: at the peak period one of these relief offices needed a dozen or so men to meet the demand. Because of the shortage of postal manpower the "relief" FPOs had to be staffed on a scratch basis generally by men drawn temporarily from the Postal Units of the assault Formations passing through the Camps.

On the 26th May the Marshalling Area Camps were sealed. Prior to that date mail for delivery in the Camps was collected from the "static" FPO at the Marshalling Area Headquarters by Post Orderlies from each of the Camps. Once the Camps were sealed however mail was delivered to the Camps on a milk round basis using one or more mobile FPOs for each Marshalling Area. Camp Post Orderlies met the mobile office inside Camp gates at pre-arranged times to receive inward mail and post outward mail, as well as to transact counter business.

Delivery of mail to troops in transit through the camps presented no mean problem. The volume of work to be handled was quite outside the capacity of the FPOs at the Marshalling Area HQs and of the Camp Post Orderlies serving the static staffs, and the work had to be handled by the "relief" FPOs plus such assistance as could be prayed in aid. It was made the more difficult by the fact that units were divided between different Camps and even in some cases between different Marshalling Areas. Within the Camps, in some cases, "block" Post Orderlies were selected from transit units on an ad hoc basis and made responsible for delivery of inward mail to detachments and units in their block, as well as for posting and so on.

Delivery of mail to assault formations and units in transit through the Marshalling Area Camps began as early as mid-May and went on up to the 2nd June when mails for the men concerned were switched for delivery overseas.

As from the time at which the Marshalling Area Camps were sealed, until news of the Normandy landings was released, all private mail posted by troops in the Camps including that posted by the static staffs, was impounded for 100% Base Censorship. Letter mail was forwarded to London and stored at No 1 APDC. Parcel mail was held at No 3 APDC at Crewe. No 1 APDC received 420 bags of letters for storage in this way

and No 3 APDC 1242 bags of parcels. Canadian Mail went to the Canadian Overseas Postal Depot which was then at the London North West District Office.

Up to D Day the work falling on the staff of the Army Postal Services in the Marshalling Areas was particularly onerous. The staffs of the static FFOs had to keep in constant touch with the Movements Staff about moves of units and detachments in transit. They had to organise the postal services as the constantly changing situation demanded. Nothing was too much for them. Special arrangements were made for example for letters for the post to be collected from troops actually aboard ships and landing craft at the last possible moment prior to sailing. The postal units of the assault formations on the other hand had not only to provide service for their parent formations and to staff the "relief" FFOs, but they also had their own pre-assault preparatory tasks to carry out like any other unit - "packing-up", water-proofing of transport, briefing, and so on. Unlike most other units they thus had a dual function to perform and it is to their credit that they did this in an exemplary manner. All Ranks worked very long hours in their desire to give the troops the best postal service which human ingenuity and determination could provide. They tackled a difficult and exhausting job with energy and enthusiasm and they carried it off to the undoubted satisfaction - and sometimes even the bewilderment - of the troops in the camps and finally on board the ships who very often got more in the way of service than they had ever hoped for or expected.

Some idea of the volume of work handled in the Marshalling Area Camps can be judged from the recorded experience of one of them - Marshalling Area "T". Between the time when it was opened for transit personnel, and the time when the camps in the Area were sealed, close on 10,000 letters were delivered and about 14,000 posted daily. 150 telegrams were also delivered daily.

It was never intended that mail should be delivered to troops in transit through the Marshalling Area Camps after D Day. Nonetheless there were instances in which units were held in the Camps for unexpectedly long periods and, exceptionally, and where time permitted, the Home Postal Centre stretched a point and allowed mail for these units to flow to the camps for so long as circumstances permitted.

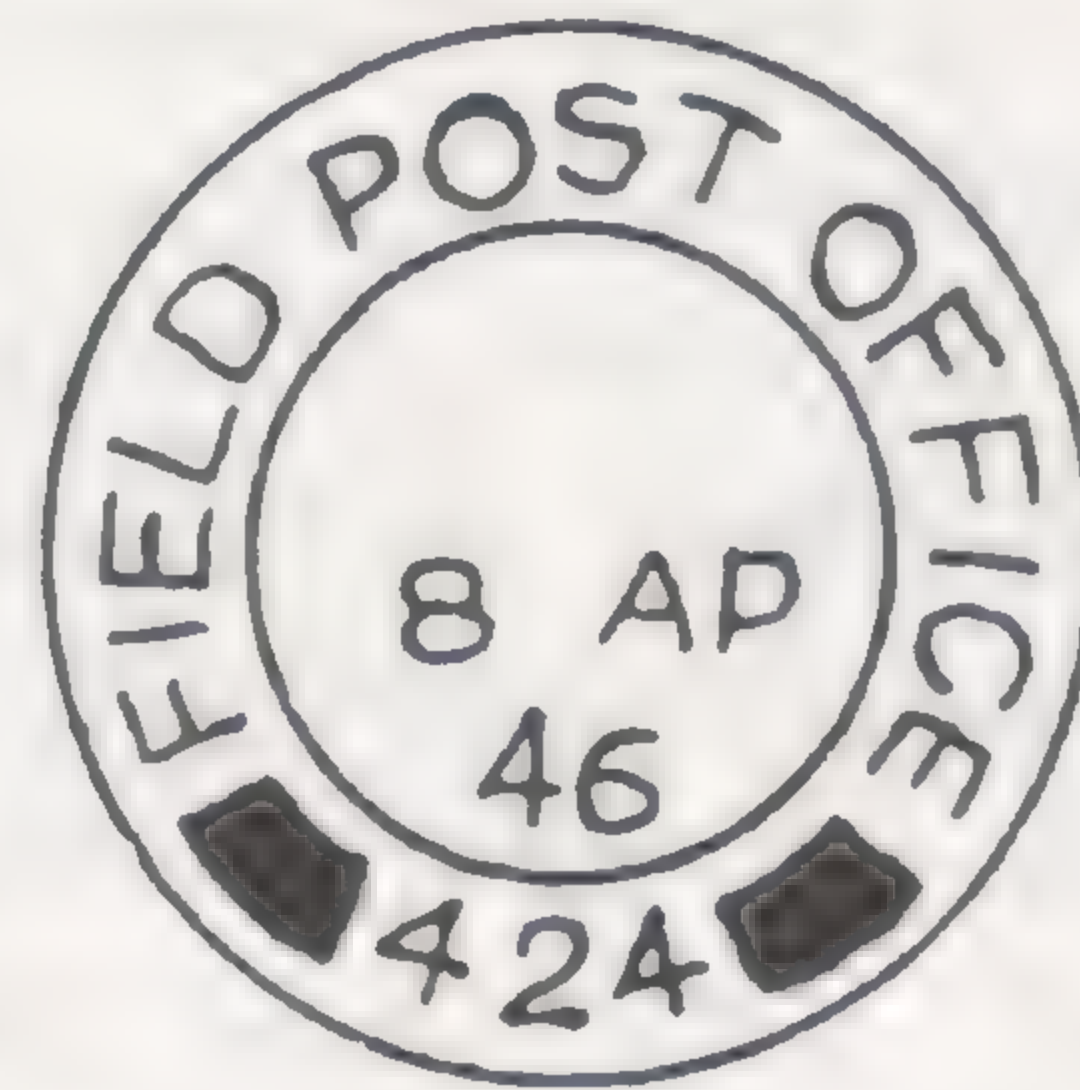
By the end of May all that could be done in the way of planning and preparation for the invasion of Europe had been done. The time had come for the effectiveness of the plans and preparations to be put to the test. The sense of tension in the air at the various army headquarters permeated the postal branches as it did all the others. For the last year or two the immediate future had been fairly predictable. Now, there loomed ahead the unpredictable. The end of one era and the beginning of another was symbolised by the arrival of June 1st - code named "Y" Day, the day of readiness. On that day it became clear that

it would be impossible any longer to accept, in the Marshalling Areas, mails for delivery to the hundreds of units which were then moving from the Camps to the Embarkation Points. On that day encoded messages were sent - generally by the Corps Postal Officers of 1 and 30 Corps - to Locations Control, 21 Army Group and to the Home Postal Depot at Nottingham. These messages called for all mail for the hundreds of units pre-located on the Beach Group APOs S.688, S.689, S.690 and S.687, to be diverted overseas or, in other words re-routed to the Port Embarkation Section at Southampton for shipping to the far shore. The code-word for "divert" was the word "ANNOY". It continued to be used long after D Day as more and more units forming part of the "build-up" were shipped to the far shore.

The many units which were not under command of a Corps but which were taking part in the assault and build-up had of course been forewarned by letter of the intention to divert their mail overseas to coincide with the arrival on the far shore of a particular Serial (portion) of the unit. The point at which mail for these units was actually diverted was controlled by a rear party of Locations Control, 21 Army Group, on the basis of information appearing daily in what were known as Movement Tables. These were published by what was known as the Build-up Control Organisation (BUCO) with whom a special liaison had been pre-arranged by the Postal Branch at 21 Army Group Headquarters. The arrangement worked virtually without hitch. The Locations Control Rear Party remained in the UK until 31 July keeping in constant touch with BUCO and with 21 Army Group Locations Control (Main) on the far shore. At the end of July the Rear Party moved to Normandy to join the main body. The Home Postal Centre then took over control of locations work for all units still in the UK, with Postal Officers of Home Commands supervising the postal arrangements for those units.

In mid-May the Supreme Commander had selected Monday, June the 5th, as the tentative date for D Day. Had this date been adhered to the main body of the assault force would have been due to sail in the early hours of Sunday, June 4th. But at 4.15 a.m. on that day, due to the exceptionally bad weather at sea, the Supreme Commander decided upon a 24 hour postponement. Even so some convoys had already put to sea and had to be recalled, while the rest of the invasion fleet tossed at anchor in crowded harbours along the south coast. Many of the troops had already been on board for 24 hours - some for three or four days. The strain of waiting in uncomfortable conditions was bound to tell even on the most hardened. It was with a sense of relief that in the early morning of June 5th, the final decision was taken to go ahead. Within 2 hours of the decision convoys were slipping out to sea into the stormy Channel on the far side of which lay the long awaited "Second Front". By mid afternoon some 3000 landing craft and more than 500 warships were moving towards the start of the swept channel which began south of the Isle of Wight at a point known officially as "Area Z" - but to the Navy as "Piccadilly Circus". A few hours later and the

airborne forces began to take off, starting with six R.A.F. Albemarles, followed by eleven hundred transports carrying British and American parachutists and two hours later, by the gliders. With the seaborne forces were the postal units belonging to the Commando Brigades, the Beach Groups, and the Divisions and Corps taking part in the assault. With the airborne forces went the parachutists, and gliderborne forces of the 6th Airborne Divisional Postal Unit. The invasion of North West Europe - Operation OVERLORD - had begun



A typical Field Post Office set up in Normandy a few days after D Day. Also, an example of the standard handstamp used at FPOs. This particular stamp was one of several allocated to XXX Corps.

CHAPTER IV

THE LANDING AND THE BUILD-UP

The assault on the Continent opened shortly after midnight on the 6th June 1944 with a landing by 6th British Airborne Division near Benouville immediately to the east of the River Orne. U.S. Airborne Forces landed at about the same time in the south east of the Cotentin peninsula. The aim of the 6th Airborne Division was to seize the bridges over the Canal de Caen and the River Orne: the bridges were captured intact. Half an hour later 3 and 5 Parachute Brigades began to drop east of the Orne and, despite strong enemy counter attacks which began to develop about 0500 hrs, the airborne troops held firm and the left flank of the Allied beachheads was thereby secured. The U.S. airborne troops dropping on the right flank of the beachhead caused great confusion, cutting the enemy communications, disorganising the defence, and, most important, capturing causeways across inundated areas behind the Utah beaches on which the seaborne assault by U.S. Forces would shortly fall.

The assault by sea began at 06.30 hrs. on a front bounded roughly by the rivers Vire and Orne. Looking at the beaches from the sea, the British and Canadians attacked on the left in the Caen - Bayeux sector, and the Americans attacked on the right. Within the British sector, 1 Corps attacked on the left and 30 Corps on the right. On the left flank of 1 Corps were the troops of 6th British Airborne Division who had landed during the night.

So far as the British sector was concerned the original plan provided for both Bayeux and Caen to be taken on D Day. Bayeux was taken on June 7th. But Caen was not taken until some time later and then only after the most intensive fighting.

Following the initial landings came a period during which the invasion forces ashore in Normandy were built up in strength as rapidly as circumstances would permit. This build up went on into July and, by the end of that month, the Americans had landed just over 900,000 men and nearly 180,000 vehicles, and the British over 660,000 men and nearly 160,000 vehicles.

While the forces ashore were being built up, the bridgehead was steadily but only slowly, enlarged. The task assigned to Second British Army was to contain the main enemy force, and even draw further enemy formations towards it, while the U.S. Forces prepared to break out on the right against what was hoped would be a relatively weak opposition. Second Army attacks were mainly directed against Caen, the "hinge" of the door against which the Allied Forces were pushing. After the most determined enemy resistance, Caen was finally captured by Second Army on the 9th July. Further advances south of Caen during July were limited and made of fierce resistance. But, by the 25th July,

in order to contain the pressure from Second Army, the Germans had concentrated almost all their armour east of the River Orne. Second Army had in effect achieved its object. It had attracted and contained the main enemy forces and the way for a breakout by Third U.S. Army was prepared.

The first postal personnel to land in Normandy were those of the 6th British Airborne Division. They went down by parachute and glider well before H-hour (the time at which the seaborne assault was due to begin). Next to land were the men 1 and 4 Special Service Brigades who went ashore about one hour after the seaborne assault began. They were followed almost immediately by men of the Beach Group detachments who, as soon as conditions on the beaches had been stabilised, set up Field Post Offices - "S" offices - as follows:

<u>APO</u>	<u>Set up by</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Beach Mtce Area</u>
S.686	5 Beach Group	Luc sur Mer	MOON
S.687	6 Beach Group	Luc sur Mer	MOON
S.688	7 Beach Group	Bernieres	STAR
S.689	8 Beach Group	sur Mer	STAR
S.690	9 Beach Group	Crepon	SUN
S.696	10 Beach Group	Crepon	SUN

After the Beach Group personnel came the men of 50 Divisional Postal Unit, and of 1 and 30 Corps Postal Units. They opened up their "D" (Divisional) and "H.T." (Corps) Offices. They also set up "phantom" offices as follows:

<u>Phantom APO</u>	<u>Set up by</u>	<u>Location</u>
S.691	30 Corps	Crepon
S.692	1 Corps	Bernieres sur Mer

Second Army Postal Unit followed and established an "S" Office (S.698) which not only served large numbers of units in the bridgehead but also acted as a cross-post centre for the Formations ashore.

All these APOs were quickly established on the basis which had been pre-planned. Within a matter of a day or so there were about a dozen APOs established ashore in addition to Field Post Offices with Formations. In some cases two or more APOs shared the same physical location - when the bridgehead was enlarged, or the breakout came, one stayed put while the others, each with the units located on it, moved to other locations.

A glance at Appendix H1 will show how the pre-location scheme was planned to work, and how in practice it worked out almost exactly as planned.

Locations Control (21 Army Group) was established in the bridgehead on D +6 and issued the first "Location Amendment sheet (Overseas)" on D +8. This, and subsequent Location Amendment advices, were concerned in the main with the "firming-up" of pre-locations. It was at this stage in particular that the pre-location system proved its worth. Such was the congestion on the Army Signals system between the theatre and the UK that, if the routing of mail from the Home Postal Centre at Nottingham had at this stage been dependent on getting information about unit locations back to the UK by signal, there would have been something bordering on chaos in the mail delivery arrangements in the theatre. In practice the great majority of pre-locations proved to be accurate and the result of this was that the mail for most units went to the right APO as from the word GO. Not only were the great majority of pre-locations correct but the "cut-offs" of unit mail in the UK were good too. Divisional, Corps and other formations arriving in the theatre found their mail awaiting them there. Non-formational units, of whom there were hundreds, not only found that the APO to which they had been told to go while still in the UK was in fact the right one but, when they called at the APO, they also found their mail awaiting them. From comments made at the time it was clear that not a few units regarded this as something in the nature of a minor miracle.

The foregoing account of the arrival of various postal units in the theatre and the opening up of numerous Field Post Offices conceals a variety of personal experiences which would be of no little interest if only they had been recorded. Unfortunately the records of such experiences are almost non-existent. Odd accounts here and there, however, show that some of the more forward FPOs, such as those with the Special Services Brigades, worked under conditions which were to say the least somewhat trying. A report from an Officer who visited one of these FPOs records how he found the office housed in a 30 cwt lorry. One sapper slept in the lorry overnight guarding the stock of stamps, postal orders, and cash, but had to take cover from time to time as firing began, in a slit trench alongside the lorry. The other members of the FPO staff spent the night in the slit trenches in an orchard nearby. The Officer records how one member of the FPO staff had been wounded in the stomach by shrapnel from a mortar shell but "since the wound was more in the nature of burning than laceration he had carried on with his job". He also records - quite laconically - how postal order sales were very high. And how, true to Post Office tradition and training, he "took the opportunity of his visit" to check the FPO accounts - and found them to be correct.

The staffs manning the APOs - "S" Offices - in the Beach Maintenance Area had little time to worry or think about what was going on around them. They were kept busy from morning till night and, as often as not, during the night when Unit Post Orderlies who had been "unable to make it to the APO" during the day called to collect their mail. There were no "hours of opening" as such. Nor were there any days off. The men snatched some sleep whenever they could. At night, air raid

alarms were frequent and the noise and flashes of anti-aircraft gunfire made it difficult to get much rest. Out at sea battleships fired salvos of heavy calibre shells which rumbled over the beachhead on their way to their targets at Caen, or St.Lo, or Villers Bocage. From the battle front came the almost continuous noise of gunfire. And in the tents which served as offices for the postal administrative staffs in the beachhead, shaded Tilley lamps burned far into the night and endless mugs of "compo" tea were brewed up as the work of one day was completed and preparations made for the next.

On D +10, No 8 Base Army Post Office arrived in the theatre and on the 20th June, commenced full scale operation at Crepon. The Base was housed in a large Dutch type brick barn and in Store tents and Marquees. The barn was used as a mail bag depot. It was open-fronted on one side and, before it could be brought into use, an R.E. Road Construction Company had to be called in to bull-doze out of it a 20 feet deep accumulation of manure, and straw. The Store tents, two of which were lashed together, functioned as the Base sorting office. The Canadian Base Army Post Office was established alongside. As soon as 8 Base APO had been set up, the Corps Offices commenced to work to it direct and the Base took over the cross-post functions which up to then had been carried out by Second Army Postal Unit. Concentration office functions were carried out by the Second Army Distribution Office. 8 Base APO continued to function as a cross-post centre for the whole theatre until the end of July when the break out came.

Meanwhile, the build up of Army Postal personnel in the theatre had been proceeding apace. In the first week it went on as follows:

<u>Day</u>	<u>No of postal personnel ashore (app)</u>
D	40
D +1	80
D +2	83
D +3	86
D +4	155
D +5	185
D +6	200

Thereafter it proceeded as follows:

D +13 (June 19th)	430
D +20 (June 26th)	520
D +27 (July 3rd)	600
D +34 (July 10th)	660
D +41 (July 17th)	680
D +48 (July 24th)	700
D +55 (July 31st)	710

By the end of August there were about 800 men of the British Army Postal Services ashore in Normandy.

From D Day up to D +5, the DADAPS 1 and 30 Corps were in sole charge of postal operations in their respective sectors - Major A S Newell in charge of operations in the SWORD sector and Major E A Driver in charge of those in the GOLD sector. Second Army Postal Branch, headed by Lt. Col. C R Smith then took over the control of postal operations in the whole of the theatre. The original intention was that Second Army should remain in overall control until D +17 (23rd June), when HQ.L of C with a Staff Increment from 21 Army Group were to take over responsibility for the Base and L of C Area. In practice, the Staff Increment from 21 Army Group took over responsibility for the whole area to the rear of Second Army boundary on the 13th July and HQ 21 Army Group Advance Section took over from them on the 29th July.

It would have been surprising if, with an operation of the magnitude and originality of OVERLORD, everything had worked precisely according to plan. What is remarkable is that both militarily and postally things worked, if not exactly to plan, then reasonably close to it. The assault forces having secured a lodgement in Normandy, with postal units having landed and being landed according to plan, the immediate requirement was to establish stable and efficient links for the conveyance of mail by sea between the UK and the beachhead. It was this which proved to be a more difficult proposition than had been anticipated. Reliance had been placed upon the Army Movements organisation to ensure - as they said they could - that once mails had been loaded by the Army Postal Services on to an assigned ship at Southampton those mails would be transported to the far shore, unloaded, and handed over to the postal personnel awaiting them, within 24 hours at the outside. Events showed that this was an over optimistic assessment of the possibilities.

Mails for the far shore were first loaded at Southampton on the 4th June consigned to the two anchorages GOLD and JUNO - exactly as pre-planned. The first despatch loaded on D -2 comprised some 500 bags of letters. This despatch was received in the 1 and 30 Corps sectors on D +2 whereas it should have arrived on D +1. The second arrival in the 1 Corps sector was on D +3 and, in the 30 Corps sector, on D +4: it should have arrived in both sectors on D +2. The third arrival in the 1 Corps sector was on D +5 and, in 30 Corps sector, on D +6: it should have reached both sectors on D +3. This lag persisted and, at intervals, extended to two or three days. It was due to a combination of difficulties - some at the UK end and some at the Normandy end of the sea link.

In the UK, mails arriving at Southampton by train from Nottingham, and newspapers from London, were met by men of a Postal Port Detachment seconded for the job from 8 Base Army Post Office. These men loaded the mails on to lighters from which, in turn, they were transferred to assigned coasters sailing to the far shore. In the first few days mails were delayed due to the lighters on which the mails had been stowed having difficulty in finding the coasters to which they were to be transferred. After the first three loadings had been completed

there was a complete break when, for two consecutive days, no mails at all could be despatched. The failure on the first day was due to the coaster assigned to take the mail developing engine trouble. On the second day there was simply no coaster available, the turn round on the far shore and thus the return of ships to the UK end of the sea link being slower than was anticipated. Fortunately, these early difficulties at the UK end proved to be essentially in the nature of teething troubles. They were quickly eradicated.

Trouble at the Normandy end of the sea link proved more difficult to bring under control. The first three arrivals of mail from the UK went into the two separate anchorages - GOLD for 30 Corps and JUNO for 1 Corps - and each Corps collected from the anchorages under its own arrangements. After the first three arrivals all mails for the theatre were consigned to one point, namely, Arromanches. In general the ships conveying mail seem to have reached their anchorages at the due time but from that point on there was trouble. Movements and the Naval authorities on the far shore had difficulty in locating ships which were carrying mail and calling them in for unloading until about 36 to 48 hours after they had anchored. After this had gone on for a few days with apparently little hope of improvement it was decided to adopt other measures based on the self-help principle. An officer of the Army Postal Services was given the job of patrolling the anchorages in an amphibious Jeep bawling through a megaphone at ship after ship - "Are you carrying mail?". This was an unenviable task in choppy and sometimes rough seas, but seemingly an indispensable one. Only in this way was it found possible to locate the ships carrying mail and this not always. Once the ships were located unloading was comparatively easy and was done normally from the coasters over the side into DUKWs. These measures produced some improvement in the service. A further improvement was secured - and the task of the Officer patrolling the anchorages greatly eased - when Movements arranged for ships carrying mail to fly the international mail pennant so permitting ready identification. But even when everything practicable had been done to facilitate the movement of the mail cross-channel the service was still not so good in terms of quality as had been planned. What was needed to bring about a radical and lasting improvement was an airlift. But that could not be provided until an airstrip which could take mail carrying Dakotas was available in the beachhead.

The reader may find it hard to understand why the rapid transshipment of mail from Southampton to Normandy should present so many problems. It has to be remembered for one thing that the express coasters which carried the mail were obliged to travel both ways in escorted convoys. Time was taken up after the mail was loaded in proceeding to the convoy assembly point and then in waiting for the rest of the convoy to assemble. On arrival off shore in Normandy the mail coaster was but one of hundreds of ships lying in the off-shore anchorages. The great majority of those ships carried men, ammunition, or other urgently needed requirements for the battle raging in Normandy. The Movements

staff who controlled the unloading of the ships and who assigned priorities for such unloading were themselves the subject of innumerable pressures. Added to all their other worries were those caused by the great storm which sprang up in the early hours of June 19th and which wrecked the American Mulberry beyond repair and caused almost limitless chaos among the ships lying off the Normandy coast, raging for three days and nights before it died down.

Before the storm abated the ammunition stocks of the Allied armies were getting dangerously low and the delays in discharging ships enforced a lull along the southern face of the bridgehead and caused a postponement of an intended British attack across the River Odon. In circumstances like these the Movements staff might perhaps be forgiven for not always appreciating the degree of priority which needed to be given to the mail lying in ships in the anchorages.

Had the prescribed timetable been adhered to, the interval between completion of loading into the express coaster at Southampton and unloading the mail on the far shore would have been of the order of 24 hours. From June 9th - on and from which date all mails were consigned to one point on the far shore - to July 6th - after which the airlift began - there were 33 sailings of ships carrying mail from Southampton. In the first half of this period there were only 3 sailings in which less than 36 hours elapsed between the time when loading at Southampton was complete and the time when unloading on the far shore began. With all the other sailings more than 48 hours elapsed between loading and unloading. One consignment took as long as 7 days - of which 4 days were spent in the anchorage off-shore.

In the second half of the period there was a marked improvement. With most sailings less than 36 hours elapsed between loading and unloading: and in only two instances did the time exceed 2 days.

In the first half of the period there were 4 days on which no mail at all was unloaded on the far shore whereas in the second half there were only two days on which this happened.

The improvement is illustrated by the following table:

June 9* - July 5**

	<u>June 9 - 22</u>	<u>June 26 - July 5</u>
a. Total no of sailings	14	19
b. No of sailings in which loading to unloading took		
- less than 24 hrs	1	2
- 24 to 48 hrs	2	15
- 48 to 72 hrs	5	1
- over 72 hrs	6	1

c. No of days on which no mail
at all was unloaded

4

2

* = all mails consigned to one point as from this date

** = day before air lift began

Notwithstanding the delays in unloading, and the interruptions of service, the overall quality of the service from the UK to the troops in Normandy was virtually as good as could be achieved in circumstances which were altogether without precedent. When everything worked to schedule letters posted in the UK on Day A were with the troops in the forward areas on Day E. The quality of the service to the troops was the subject of relatively little complaint. After the first month or so of course, with the inauguration of the air lift for letter mail, it improved dramatically insofar as transit time was concerned.

Meanwhile, in the homeward direction, the first despatches of mail from the beachhead had been made by the 6th Airborne Division Postal Unit and the Beach Group APO S.698. Put on board a homegoing vessel on D +2 (8 June) the despatches reached the UK on D +5 (11 June). 1 Corps made up its first despatch for the UK on the 9 June and 30 Corps on the 10th June. On the 21st June (D +15) the work of making up and despatching all mails from the theatre to the UK was taken over by 8 Base APO.

For the first few days after despatches in the homegoing direction started the service was reasonably good. But from mid-June onwards the service to many parts of the UK suddenly deteriorated. The deterioration first became apparent to relatives in the UK who began to be troubled by the absence of letters from, or long delays in between the receipt of letters from the soldiers in France. It next became apparent to the soldiers themselves who began to get letters from home asking - why no letters, or, why are letters suddenly taking so long? It was at first thought that shipping delays were the cause of the delay - and it is true that in the early days they were partly responsible. The fact that the homegoing mail - carrying ships were not allowed to sail independently, but had to travel in convoy, in itself imposed a certain amount of delay. In addition, and for a time, there were relatively serious delays in calling the mail-carrying coasters in to berth at Southampton from the anchorage off the Isle of Wight. Times of transit for homegoing mails from the Base APO in Normandy to handing over to the postal authorities in Southampton ranged from 48 hours to nearly 96 hours in one instance. The times from anchoring off the Isle of Wight to hand-over at Southampton ranged from 12 to 43 hours. The situation improved as the machinery for identifying the mail-carrying ships and calling them in from the anchorage improved.

Shipping delays were not, however, the principal cause of the mid-June

sudden deterioration in service. That lay elsewhere. It was quite outside the control of the Army Postal Services and could not have been foreseen by them. It lay in the dislocation of transport and postal services in London caused by the bombardment of the Metropolis by flying bombs which had begun on the 13th June. During the pre-D Day planning period it had been arranged with the GPO that mail for UK Provincial addresses posted by the troops in Normandy would in the main be routed via London Railway termini if it was in direct despatches for Provincial centres, or to the Mount Pleasant Sorting Office in London if it required further sorting to get it to its destination. The reason for routing mail via London in this way was simple. London, being at the focus of the UK Railway network, had a wider and more comprehensive range of mail outlets for provincial addresses than any other centre in the UK. Mail routed via London would therefore get a better service than it would if routed via a provincial centre or centres - subject always to the condition that railway stations and services and mail centres in London were functioning normally or close to normally. The flying bomb attacks interrupted both rail and mail services in London to such an extent that, for a time, London lost its superiority as a mail centre over comparable provincial centres. Mount Pleasant was particularly hard hit. As soon as it was realised - on or about the 12th July - that mails from the Forces in Normandy passing through London were subject to intolerable delay the GPO advised that immediate steps be taken to divert from London to Provincial Mail Distribution Centres as much mail as was possible. This step, which was implemented with commendable rapidity by the Base APO in Normandy, along with some other measures taken by the GPO in the UK, had a radical and speedy effect on the quality of home-going postal service. This improved almost out of recognition. Complaints about delay stopped almost overnight and, by mid-July, the effects of the flying bomb attacks on the mail services were minimal.

On the 6th July a daily two-way airlift was established between the UK and the theatre "for first class letter mail". What this meant in practice was that all letters as such - those paid at letter rate of postage - were given air conveyance. (The two-tier service, as we now know it, was not in being in 1944). Those letters which were classified as "printed papers", and items paid at the "newspaper" rate of postage, were excluded from the airlift and continued to travel by sea. So did parcels. The special daily issue of national newspapers distributed through APO channels was, however, included in the airlift being given second priority after the first class letter mail.

Mail for conveyance by air was despatched from the Home Postal Depot at Nottingham (and from the Canadian Overseas Postal Depot) to Blakehill Farm airfield near Swindon by road. Loading, into two RCAF Dakotas allocated specifically for the carriage of mail and newspapers, was due to be completed by about 0600 hours. The planes then flew to an airstrip in Normandy which they were due to reach about 0800 hours.

These airstrips were, in every sense of the word, temporary. They were little more than a steel mesh carpet, laid on a suitable flat field. The airstrips used by the mail carrying Dakotas varied from day to day according to the state of the battle and the air operations related to it. RAF Headquarters in Normandy advised 8 Base APO daily, by telephone, of the map-ref. location of the air strip which would be used that day. The Base then made transport arrangements accordingly. Generally, however, for the first two months after the airlift began the airstrip used was either one at Sommervieu near Bayeux (Code description B8) or at Amblie, near Banville (Code description B14). The Dakotas which carried mail and newspapers from the UK to the theatre were scheduled to return to the UK the same day carrying mail posted by the troops. The first day's airlift to the theatre comprised 8100lb of British and 1600lb of Canadian letter mail. The first despatch from the theatre to the UK comprised 7000lb of mail.

Introduction of the airlift brought about an immediate and striking improvement in the quality of the service from the UK to the troops in the bridgehead. There were, it is true, interruptions of service caused by bad weather and when these occurred they were all the more noticeable because of the good service on fine days. On the days when flying was to schedule, early Day A postings in the UK reached the theatre on Day B and were in the hands of the troops on Days B or C: late Day A postings on Days C or D. In the reverse direction - from the theatre to the UK - the service for the first week or so was nothing like so good as it should have been, due to the flying bomb troubles in London, and there were odious comparisons made between the speed of service in the two directions. But once the trouble in the UK had been located and dealt with there was a radical improvement in the homegoing service and, thereafter, it was of roughly the same quality in both directions.

The delays in the homegoing service to which reference has already been made produced an unexpected problem with the mail for rear parties (unit residues) left in the UK. It had been arranged that these rear parties should continue to use their unit address followed by "APO England". Their mail therefore went first to the main body of the unit on the far shore where it was redirected and returned to the rear party still in the UK. Security considerations demanded that this arrangement be adhered to in the early days after the landings but the delays in the cross channel service made the arrangement increasingly difficult to sustain in the face of mounting restiveness amongst the men in the rear parties. Authority was therefore given for unit residues still in the UK to adopt an open address and they did this on the 28th July. The address took the form - name of unit; name of residue camp in which located; followed by the civil (place name) address of the camp.

Reference has already been made to a decision taken early in the planning period that copies of British daily newspapers - the nationals - should be supplied to the troops in Normandy on the scale of one

newspaper to ten men. A further decision was that the Army Postal Distribution system should be used for the purpose of delivery. The system adopted was as follows. Bulk supplies of newspapers were purchased by NAAFI in the UK. By agreement with the Newspaper Proprietors' Association the supplies included copies of every National daily in proportion to their circulation in the UK. The bulk supplies received from the printers were despatched from London (Waterloo) at 2.40 a.m. to reach Southampton at 5.18 a.m.. At Southampton an army unit created specially for the purpose and designated No. 1 Newspaper Distribution Unit (NDU), took over the bulk supplies and broke them down into packs of 10 assorted newspapers. The packs were then enclosed in mail bags - 28 packs to a bag. Each of the bags with its 280 newspapers enclosed was known as a "standard bag". The time allowed for "breaking bulk" and packing was severely limited since the aim was to deliver the newspapers to the troops in Normandy on the day following publication. This meant that the day's consignment of standard bags had to be handed over to the Army Postal Services Postal Port Regulating Section at Southampton in time for loading and sailing on the day of publication. (When the airlift started on 6th July the standard bags were consigned to the Postal Airfield Detachment at Blakehill Farm airfield near Swindon). On arrival of the day's consignment of standard bags on the far shore, supplies had to be distributed to each and every A/FPO on the basis of one newspaper for every ten men served postally through that A/FPO. To this end lists were prepared showing, in alphabetical order, the entitlement to newspapers of each and every type of unit in 21 Army Group (and in the 2nd Tactical Air Force) which was over 100 strong. Copies of this list were supplied to all A/FPOs. By applying the lists to the pre-location schedules, a rough allocation of standard bags to A/FPOs was decided upon before D Day. In the early stages distribution within the theatre proceeded on the basis of this pre-D Day allocation and worked very well indeed. Later on, day to day adjustments in the allocations of standard bags to A/FPOs were made on the basis of the Daily Location amendment statements compiled within the theatre.

The original plans were that delivery of newspapers should start on D +4. In fact the first despatch from Southampton was made on D Day and some forward units, as well as many in the rearward areas, received newspapers out of this despatch on D +2. (The first news broadsheet issued by the Army Education Services was produced by 3 (British) Division and did not appear until D +3.)

The total number of newspapers purchased from the Newspaper Publishers for inclusion in the D Day despatch from Southampton was 56,000. This was stepped up a month later to 96,000 daily.

Following the relatively good start which had been made on D +2 subsequent arrivals of newspapers in Normandy were, for a time, irregular. They were affected by precisely the same shipping difficulties as caused the arrivals of mail to be erratic. It proved quite

impossible to meet the aim of delivery on the day following publication so long as conveyance was by sea - the length of time taken up by the convoyed cross channel journey in itself made this impossible of achievement. Once the airlift started, however, on 6th July the effect was dramatic and it became commonplace thereafter for newspapers to be with the troops on the day following publication.

Notwithstanding the reservations expressed by the Army Postal Services when they were first asked to take on the delivery of newspapers there is no doubt that by and large the system worked smoothly and well. Such grumbles as there were focused usually on the fact that individuals sometimes got newspapers which were not entirely to their liking. Suffice it to say that the NCO in charge of a Field Post Office who so bestowed his favours as to ensure that copies of the Times went to the local Commanding Officer and his entourage, and copies of the Daily Mirror to the Sergeants Mess and the NAAFI, was almost certain to be popular with everyone.

Well before D Day it was decided that, for the initial period of the assault and build-up the postal address "APO England" would continue to be used by formations and units of 21 Army Group which were in Normandy, as well as those which were still in England. The main object of this was to help cloak the movement of formations and units to the Continent, and to deny to the enemy information about the size and rate of the build-up which he might otherwise have obtained if units had changed their address immediately on arrival in Normandy. This apart it would have been most inconvenient anyway for units and men to be bothering with a change of address at the very time when the over-riding and virtually exclusive objective was to secure and enlarge the foothold on the Continent.

It was realised nonetheless that the "APO England" address could not be retained indefinitely and that it would indeed become an anachronism once the bulk of 21 Army Group was in France. Before D Day therefore consideration was given to the form of address to be adopted as and when "APO England" was abandoned. Various alternatives were considered, including a revival of the almost traditional address "British Expeditionary Force" (B.E.F.). But the issue was settled by the personal intervention of the Prime Minister and the choice of address "British Liberation Army" (B.L.A.). The Royal Air Force had reservations about this form of address. They pointed out, and with reason, that they were not an Army but an Air Force. In consequence it was decided that formations and units of the 2nd Tactical Air Force serving in Normandy should use the address "C/O B.L.A.". This form of address was also adopted by other non-British Forces serving with 21 Army Group on the Continent - ie the Czech, Polish, Belgian, and other Allied contingents, as well as by sundry welfare organisations accompanying or visiting the Allied armies.

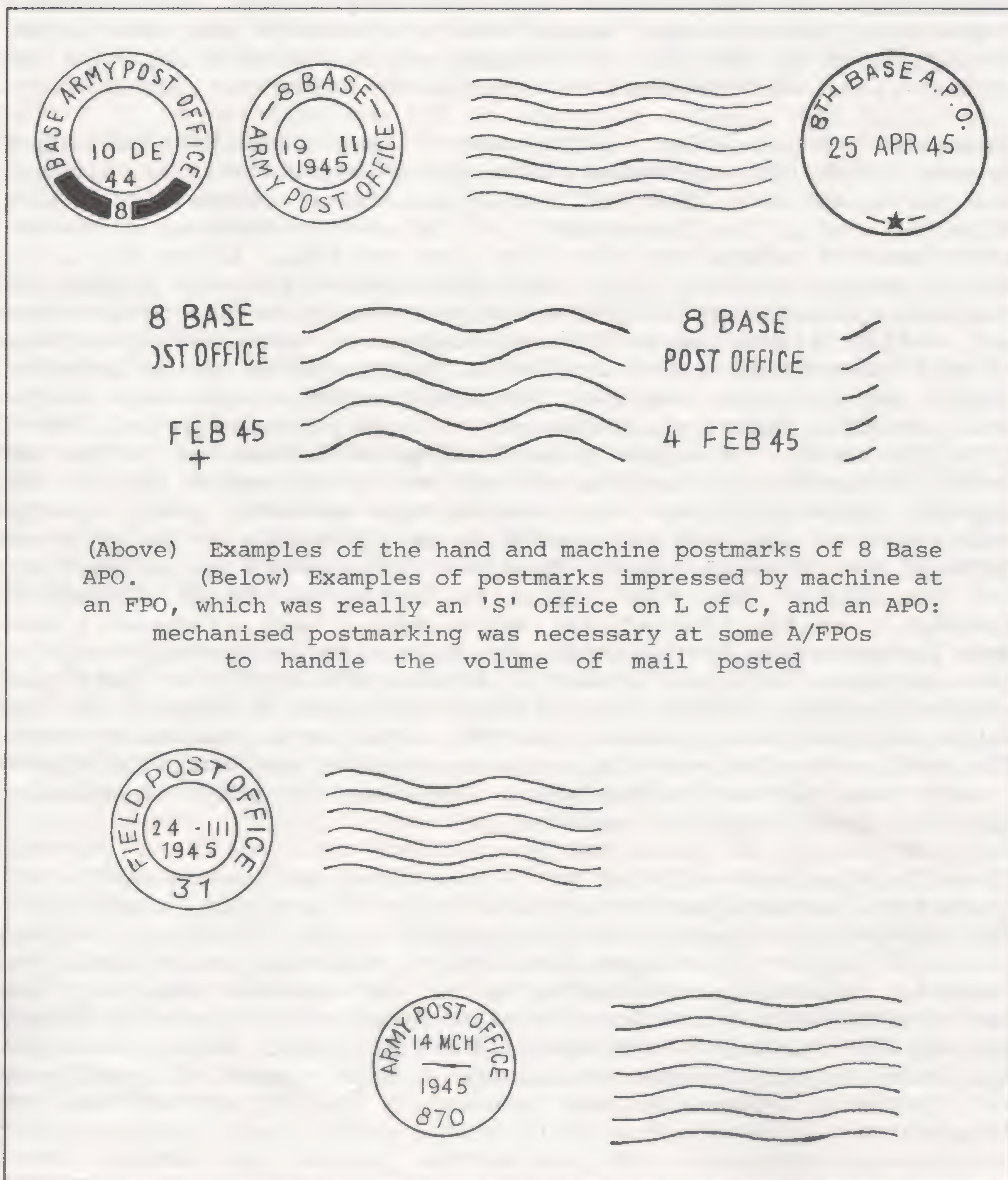
Orders to adopt the "B.L.A." address were not issued until some little

time after D Day and, shortly after the landing, pressures began to arise from within Second Army for a change in the "APO England" address. This was understandable in a sense. The troops who had already landed rather resented having to write home from an address which made it appear that they were still in England, when, in fact, they were taking part in the stirring events in Normandy. Before the "B.L.A." address was promulgated, on the 22nd June, Second Army on their own initiative, adopted a 'homemade' address "British Western European Force" (B.W.E.F.) Fortunately, this address was "self directing" so far as the GPO in England was concerned and no difficulty arose from its use. It was soon replaced by the "B.L.A." address which came into force on the 14th July, and which remained in use until the end of the campaign.

Throughout the pre-D Day planning period close contact was maintained between the British and United States Army Postal authorities. Although the postal services for the British and United States Forces were organised more or less independently of one another there was a constant interchange of information about what each was doing. Ad hoc discussion led to mutual agreement that, until such time as both the British and United States Base Post Offices were firmly established on the Continent and could be linked together by road service or other means, exchange of mail between the British and United States sectors of the beachhead should not be direct but that correspondence from one Force to the other should circulate via the respective Depots in the UK. For a short time after D Day the volume of mail exchanged between the British and United States sectors in this way was relatively small. But it soon began to grow and the need for establishing a system of direct exchange independent of the Depots in the UK became pressing. It was therefore arranged that the United States Base Post Office, which was at Cherbourg and the British Base Post Office at Crepon, should be offices of Exchange - in the international mails sense - and arrangements were made to have a daily road connection between Crepon and Cherbourg for this purpose. There was already a British APO (S.676) at Brix just outside Cherbourg. It had been established to serve a number of British units which had been grouped in the Brix area for stores transit work. The road connection with Cherbourg was made by extending the Crepon - Brix road service to Cherbourg. The direct exchange arrangements came into force on the 1st August.

By early August the build-up of 21 Army Group as a whole was to all intents and purposes complete. So was the build up of the Postal Units. The residue of the Postal Branch at Rear HQ 21 Army Group finally closed in the UK on the 10th August and moved to Vaucelles (near Bayeux) in Normandy. Meanwhile, in anticipation of the expected break out from the bridgehead the Second Army Postal Depot was moved forward to Nonant and, by the 7th August had assumed the function of cross-post centre for Second Army. This move anticipated a rapid advance of Second Army with distances between the rear boundary of the Army and the Base APO lengthening at such a rate as would quickly make it quite impracticable

to circulate intra-Army cross post via the Base. Not all the intra-Army cross post circulated via the Second Army Postal Depot while it was at Nonant. There were many units of Second Army Troops still employed in L of C roles and these continued to be served by the "S" Offices in the beachhead, their cross post circulating for the time being via the Base APO.



CHAPTER V

THE BREAK-OUT AND THE PURSUIT

At the end of July and beginning of August, Caen having been captured, British and Canadian Forces made a series of massive thrusts south and south east. Second Army crossed the River Orne, and First Canadian Army driving south towards Falaise, linked up with Second Army and, on the 16th August, entered Falaise. Strong German Armoured Formations were contained by the pressure in this section of the front. Meanwhile, on the right flank of the bridgehead, attacks by the American First and Third Armies were being steadily intensified and, on July 27/28, the German defences gave way and the Americans broke out into open country. The Germans tried to restore their shattered front with a counter attack in the direction of Mortain but this was held by First U.S. Army. The U.S. Armies then pushed south towards Rennes, Third U.S. Army driving on Laval and Le Mans where it was ordered to turn north and seek a junction with Second Army and First Canadian Army. On 19th August the U.S. Forces met the Canadians and the so-called "Falaise pocket" was closed. Large numbers of Germans, and masses of equipment, were captured or destroyed in the "pocket". The German armies were broken and thoroughly disorganised. The planned "Break-out" from the bridgehead had occurred.

In the wake of the disorganised enemy, U.S. Forces swept towards Paris and the Seine while, on their sector, British and Canadian Forces swept north, crossed the Seine and set out on a rapid pursuit of the Germans northwards through France. The Canadians on the left flank swept northwards along the coast and proceeded to clear the Channel ports of the enemy. The British advanced up the line Amiens - Arras - Tournai and, within a short time, had captured Brussels and Antwerp. The U.S. Forces thrust into Central and Eastern France and headed for Germany. The advance of the Allied armies was, however, now brought to a halt by growing maintenance difficulties and hardening enemy resistance. In the second half of September Allied Airborne armies were used in an attempt to cross the Lower Rhine. The attempt culminated in the stand of the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem. The operation - code named MARKET GARDEN - was not wholly successful and it came to an end during the night of 25/26th September. But a deep thrust of some sixty miles had been made into enemy held territory and the capture of a bridge at Grave, and of Nijmegen, with its road bridge intact, was to prove invaluable in later operations.

The last three months of 1944 opened with Second British Army established on the Belgian - Dutch frontier and with First Canadian Army working its way slowly northwards in the area about Antwerp having almost completed the work of clearing the Channel ports between Le Havre and the estuary of the Scheldt. Administratively the period was given over to consolidation and build up ready for a further offensive. The lines of communication of 21 Army Group now extended from Brussels to Bayeux

with large numbers of L of C units and huge quantities of stores still in the Rear Maintenance Area in Normandy. These stores had to be brought forward and stockpiled in the Forward Maintenance Areas before the British and Canadian Armies could make another major advance and, in particular, cross the Rhine and advance into the heartland of Germany. The units which, in large numbers, were still in the Rear Maintenance Area also had to move forward and, generally, the L of C tail had to be curled up. The previous two months had been a period of great fluidity with little or no time to consolidate. Vast numbers of units had been more or less continuously on the move for several weeks and, of necessity, there had been much improvisation.

A prime requirement was the opening of the approaches to Antwerp so that the port could be brought fully into use for the shipment and unloading of all the massive quantities of ammunition and stores required for the advance across the Rhine.

In the middle of this period came an unexpected turn of events - the German offensive in the Ardennes and the so called Battle of the Bulge: an operation directed against splitting the Allied Armies and recapturing Antwerp. The offensive failed and the German thrust was contained. But it was February before the U.S. Armies in the north regained the line they had been holding six weeks earlier. The assault across the Rhine, and on the Ruhr and the German heartland, was correspondingly delayed.

Viewed from an administrative standpoint the break-out from the bridge-head came barely in time for the postal services - as it did for the army as a whole. By the end of July '44 hundreds of units were cooped up in an area smaller than Sussex. In this area there were only two towns of any size - Caen and Bayeux. Caen was little better than a pile of rubble. Bayeux, a small cathedral and market town, with a population of little more than 100,000, was full to overflowing and hopelessly congested. New by-pass roads had had to be bulldozed round the outskirts to ease the traffic congestion.

Accommodation for mail work was at a premium as it was for every other requirement. When the break-out came the "S" Army Post Office in Bayeux had grown to almost unmanageable proportions. At its peak it was serving close on five hundred units. With the seizure of Caen an "S" Office (S.711) was opened in that town and that too grew like a mushroom almost overnight until, at one time, it rivalled in size the Office in Bayeux. The staffing of these two offices presented a grave problem. The resources available were limited indeed - two L of C Postal Units. The men who staffed them worked flat out with little time for rest and even they could only just cope. To ease the burden civilian staff were recruited insofar as they were available and suitable and after they had been trained to do the more elementary postal jobs some relief was obtained, though not much. Both as regards accommodation and staff

it was a question of making do with what was available. It must remain a matter for conjecture what would have happened had the length of time for which the huge forces poised for the break-out and confined within the bridgehead lasted much longer. Nevertheless the possibility of that happening had to be considered: not least against the chance that it might be necessary to spend the winter in the bridgehead. "Winterisation" schemes were in fact put in hand for the bridgehead installations. Those for the Base Army Post Office, for example, provided for its being accommodated in Romney huts. Fortunately, the rapid advance through France and into Belgium and Holland made all the "winterisation" plans superfluous and they were abandoned.

With the break-out there began a period in which "the front" of the Allied armies moved forward through France, and into Belgium and Holland at an altogether unexpected speed. This rapid advance taxed the resources of the Army Postal Services to the limit - as it did the resources of so many other Services in 21 Army Group. The fundamental problem for the postal services was one of providing a continuous or near continuous postal service for close on a million men - equal to the population of the city of Birmingham - most of them moving in pockets, by road, over a distance equivalent to that from London to Newcastle and finally spread out over that distance. Many units were on the move more or less continuously. Hardly had a postal roadhead terminal been established - whether Army or Corps - than it became useless and had to be moved further forward. This was Exercises BUMPER and SPARTAN all over again, but with many more men involved and much greater distances to be covered. Distances between Armies and the Rear Maintenance Area in Normandy - through which all supplies for the advancing armies had to come - lengthened by tens of miles daily, and the distances over which mails had to be moved forward from the Base APO to the various postal roadhead terminals lengthened correspondingly. The rear Army boundaries moved rapidly forward and as they did so they left an ever lengthening L of C occupied, not only by L of C units proper, but by units of Army Troops, and even whole Formations grounded by lack of transport to move them forward. Signal communication between the Rear Maintenance Area in Normandy and the forward areas deteriorated rapidly. At times signals, even though given a priority grading of "Immediate", were taking two to three days in transit. It became quicker to send postal location advices by post, than to Signal channels as was usual.

With the rapid advance of the Armies, postal resources along the lines of communication with the Rear Maintenance Area in Normandy were stretched almost to breaking point. The inadequacy of these resources had been the subject of contentious disputes in the planning stages, the War Office having refused to provide the manpower for more than one L of C Postal Unit. The misgivings on this point which had been expressed by 21 Army Group were now shown to have been fully justified. Circumstances on the ground demonstrated the need for a change of ideas and it was not long before there were two L of C Postal Units in the

theatre. By the end of the year, there were four while, in the early part of 1945 two more were provided making six in all. The situation was particularly critical up to the point when a third L of C Postal Unit became available. Indeed, it was only possible to cope with the situation produced by the rapidly lengthening L of C by calling upon the APO staffs to give everything they had got and more; by employing Prisoners of War; by borrowing odd bodies from other units such as the Reinforcement Holding Units; and by recruiting such civilian labour as was available and could be trained rapidly to do the less skilled jobs. In the main these supplementary classes of labour were employed on unskilled and non-technical jobs such as loading and unloading mail lorries, but some - the more able - were employed on sorting mail posted by the troops and addressed to the UK. With the temporary stabilisation of the operational situation it became possible in France and Belgium to recruit growing numbers of intelligent young women, usually with a language qualification. They were adaptable and quick to learn and they soon provided an invaluable and growing component of the staffing. At the peak as many civilians - about 1000 - as uniformed Army Postal personnel were employed.

The first substantial relief for the hard pressed postal personnel along the L of C came when a third L of C Postal Unit was provided. It came from an unexpected source. The battles in front of Caen had virtually exhausted the supply of infantry reinforcements and left many infantry battalions seriously under strength. To meet this situation a decision was taken in mid-August to disband the 59th Infantry Division and so to create a much needed supply of infantry reinforcement for the other infantry divisions in Second Army. The opportunity was seized upon to convert the 59th Infantry Division Postal Unit into a third L of C Unit.

Further relief came when, in December 1944, it was decided to disband the 50th Infantry Division in order to maintain the supply of infantry reinforcements. Again, the opportunity was seized upon to convert the Division's Postal Unit into an L of C Postal Unit making four such in the theatre.

While the disbandment of these two Divisions provided much needed relief for the hard pressed L of C postal organisation it was attended by a new and not inconsiderable problem of its own making - that of dealing with the mail which continued to come to hand for the disbanded units of the Divisions. It was decided to meet this situation by arranging for the Post Orderlies of the disbanded units to remain behind after disbandment. Working under the supervision of a microcosm of Postal Section personnel they redirected from nominal rolls mail for men posted away as reinforcements. This arrangement worked satisfactorily and was continued until the flow of correspondence had fallen to almost vanishing point.

A measure of reorganisation which should have been carried out earlier, but which was delayed until circumstances made it essential, concerned

the postal arrangements for the Second Tactical Air Force. The "excuse" was the usual one of shortage of manpower. Two Postal Units - 5 and 8 Air Formation Postal Units - had been created originally with the job of serving all the RAF units in the theatre. But 83 and 84 Groups RAF each had the job of giving forward air fighter support to the Armies - Second Army and First Canadian Army - and it quickly became obvious, with the rapid advance, that the two Fighter Groups each needed independent postal units to move forward with them as the Armies (with the related Fighter Groups) moved further ahead and away from the Rear Maintenance Area in Normandy. The Air Formation Postal Units were not adapted for this purpose. Steps were therefore taken to form two new units - 83 and 84 Independent Group Postal Units - rather on the lines of Divisional Postal Units. These moved forward with the Fighter Groups. Units of the Bomber and Base RAF Groups - 23 and 2 Group RAF - operating well behind the rear Army boundaries continued to be served and were served without difficulty by the normal L of C postal organisation viz from "S" Offices.

Meanwhile, as the Armies moved forward, taking with them of course their formation Field Post Offices, a chain of static APOs - "S" Offices - was established in their wake, in towns or key communication centres, along the lines of advance. Thus:

<u>Location of Office</u>	<u>Number of Office</u>	<u>Date Office Opened</u>
Caen	S.711	5 August
Falaise	S.702	22 August
St Loup	S.677	26 August
Epine	S.678	26 August
Lisieux	S.688	4 September
Dieppe	S.691	4 September
Rouen	S.689	4 September
Amiens	S.712	4 September
Evreux	S.703	12 September
Lille	S.714	13 September
Brussels	S.717	13 September
Antwerp	S.715	13 September
Arras	S.713	18 September
Ostend	S.718	19 September
Boulogne	S.719	30 September
Paris	S.720	3 October
Ghent	S.716	28 October

Calais	S.721	19 November
Bruges	S.722	28 December

This expansion of APO facilities along the Lines of Communication was accompanied by a contraction of APO facilities in the Rear Maintenance Area as the centre of gravity of the Allied Forces moved forward from Normandy to the north. The shrinkage is illustrated by the following table:

<u>Office</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date of Closure</u>
S.695	Banville	24 June
S.687	Luc sur Mer	31 July
S.693	Bernieres sur Mer	31 July
S.688	Bernieres sur Mer	1 August
S.689	Bernieres sur Mer	1 August
S.691	Crepon	3 August
S.696	Crepon	3 August
S.699	Longues	5 September
S.697	Banville	6 September
S.686	Bernieres sur Mer	15 September
S.692	Bernieres sur Mer	2 October
S.700	Port en Bessin	2 October
S.690	Crepon	3 November
S.676	Brix	8 November

A comprehensive statement showing the dates on which the various "S" Offices in the theatre opened and closed during the period 6 June - 31 Dec 1944 is at Appendix H2.

In an advance of the rapidity of that which took place after the break-out from the bridgehead, it would have been extraordinary, indeed almost miraculous, if postal deliveries to all the units caught up in the advance had been maintained day in, day out, without interruption. They were not. Some units suffered breaks in service which though they may not have lasted more than two to three days were breaks nonetheless. Others suffered from a temporary "loss of sequence".

The causes of these troubles were various. The breaks in service were attributable almost exclusively to the speed of the advance - no sooner had a unit made arrangements with the APS for its mail to be re-routed to an APO along the line of advance than it would be ordered forward again necessitating a further rapid change in the arrangements for

mail delivery. In circumstances like these temporary breaks in delivery service were virtually inevitable. Some units were unable to collect their mail for a day or two because they had been temporarily deprived of transport so that the forward thrust of the fighting formations could be maintained as long as possible. Usually, it was not long before they managed to borrow transport, or get another unit to collect for them.

The problem of temporary "loss of sequence" arose in this way. A unit collecting its mail from an "S" Office along the line of advance would get orders to move and, as it were, disappear into the blue. Mail for the unit would then continue to flow to that office until it became clear that the unit was no longer going to call, or until instructions were received to divert the mail to another office. Instructions given to "S" Offices about disposal of uncollected mail followed a hitherto standard procedure - return the mail to the Base APO. But while this was happening the unit which had moved forward would re-establish contact with the APS in the forward area and quickly begin again to receive current mail from the UK which, as will be explained in the following paragraphs, was by then being flown into a forward airfield. There was, however, a missing sequence of letters for the unit which might not appear in the forward area for a few days having gone back to Base so that it might be re-routed to the new APO of service. Signal and transport delays which were prevalent, indeed unavoidable, at the time made the situation worse than it would otherwise have been. In retrospect it is clear that it would have been better if "S" Offices along the L of C had been instructed to send mail for "lost" units to the Army Depot in the forward area rather than back to the Base. Had this been done the problem of "loss of sequence" would have been minimised even though not entirely eliminated.

The reader would be wrong to assume from what has been said that the breaks in service, and losses of sequence, to which reference has been made, amounted to a serious failure in service. Irritating as they might have been and doubtless were at the time, they were, viewed overall, little more than a blemish on an otherwise remarkable service. The fighting formations were scarcely affected by the failures at all - they had their own formation FPOs providing them with a continuous or near continuous service. The units which suffered from temporary breaks in service, or loss of sequence, were mostly units of Army Troops strung out along the L of C in the rear of the advancing armies.

So far as the Army Staff were concerned these temporary difficulties were accepted as one, and not by any means the only one, of the prices to be paid for operational success. Substantially the postal services to the advancing troops were maintained throughout with a degree of efficiency which was praiseworthy considering all the difficulties involved. In the month of September 1944 a thoroughgoing test was made of the length of time taken to deliver letters addressed "B.L.A." and posted in the UK, to the soldiers in 21 Army Group. Some 50,000 letters

were sampled. The average time per letter, from posting to delivery, worked out at two-and-a-half-days. Not bad going really.

It is perhaps worth remarking in passing that in September 1941, exactly three years earlier when, in somewhat similar circumstances, the German armies were thrusting rapidly and deeply into Russia, the German authorities broadcast that both their citizens and soldiers should not expect to receive letters. They added that the military authorities could not afford transport for the carriage of mails, and traffic along the Russian roads was difficult anyway. The furore which would have followed had a comparable announcement been made by the British authorities while the Allied Armies were advancing through France and Belgium is a matter for interesting speculation.

The rapid advance of the armies made increasingly urgent a change in the arrangements for lifting mail by air between the UK and the theatre. The fundamental need was a split in the airlift from the UK so that mail for Second Army could be flown direct to a forward airfield instead of being routed via the Rear Maintenance Area (RMA) in Normandy. Before this need was met the air mail services between the UK and RMA were themselves reorganised. On the 21st August a separate Dakota service for conveyance of Canadian mail from Northolt to airstrip B14 (Amblie, near Crepon) and back to Northolt, was established. On the return journey 2000 lb of capacity was allocated for the conveyance of mail posted by British units for the London area and the Home Counties. On the 23rd August the British Air Service from the UK was re-timed to give a departure from the UK at 1200 hrs with an arrival in the theatre at about 1400 hrs. It is worth noting at this point that, by that date, the British and Canadian armies were closing on the Seine, but the arrangements for conveyance of mail inside the theatre by road were so organised and operated that all correspondence arriving in Normandy at 1400 hrs was delivered throughout the theatre by the following day.

Several non-flying days, caused partly by bad weather and partly by very difficult conditions on the temporary air strips in use in Normandy called for a fixed routine to be adopted when there was "no flying". This routine was put into force in late August. Briefly it provided that in the event of there being no flying on any particular day, mail would be held on the UK airfield for 24 hours. If flying was still not possible on the second day the first day's mail would be re-routed for conveyance to the theatre by sea. Subsequent events were to throw doubt on the wisdom of this decision, but at the time, it seemed to be the right one.

By the 5th September Second Army was well into Belgium and, on the 7th September, the airlift was split. One plane continued to fly from Blakehill in the UK to airstrip B14 in Normandy but its load was confined to mail and newspapers for the rearward areas. A second plane, carrying mail for First Canadian Army, also continued to fly from

Northolt to airstrip B14. A third aircraft flew from Blakehill to Amiens (airfield B48) with mail and newspapers for Second British Army.

On the 10th September the Second Army airfield was again moved forward: this time to Brussels (B56).

At the outset there was a good deal of difficulty with the operation of the split airlift. Mail was not infrequently sent to the wrong airfield. Following several conferences with 2nd Tactical Air Force, new services were introduced on the 16th September. Under the new arrangements one plane flew on a milk round basis from the UK to airfield B6 at Coulomb (half-way between Bayeux and Caen); then to B56 (Brussels); and then back to the UK. A second plane flew round the circuit in the reverse direction; UK - B56 - B6 - UK. This arrangement had marked advantages over that which preceded it. It not only overcame misloading as between airfields but provided an air link for conveyance of cross-post and other correspondence between the forward and rear areas. There were the inevitable teething troubles with the new service. But, with a further minor modification which was made on the 5th November, the airlift settled down and worked reasonably satisfactorily, despite erratic timekeeping, until winter set in. Serious trouble then developed but more will be heard of this later.

The circumstances which had led to a split in the air lift between the UK and the theatre also called for a split in the surface lift. On the 1st September, First Canadian Army, sweeping north along the Channel coast, liberated Dieppe and the port was rapidly put into limited operation. This made it possible to make Dieppe the point of entry for surface mail for troops in the forward areas. Premises for an Advanced Base Post Office were found in the town and a unit specially created for the purpose and designated No 18 Base APO was formed and moved into the accommodation. The first arrival of surface mail in Dieppe was on the 10th September and from then on a daily service, inward and outward, was operated. It had the effect of reducing very considerably the road lift for surface mail for troops who were across the Seine. That river became in fact the line of demarcation for mail purposes, units on the right bank being served from Dieppe and those on the left from Arromanches (later Caen). At one time it was thought that Dieppe might develop into a full Base Army Post Office but this did not happen: the capture of Brussels and Antwerp put paid to it.

As soon as Antwerp was captured (on the 4th September), accommodation which would house the main Base Post Office for the theatre, viz 8 BAPO, was obtained. The accommodation was ideally suited for the purpose. It was a huge warehouse of the Societe de Congo with 50,000 sq.ft. of floor space, lifts at each end of the building, and good approaches and loading platforms. Bearing in mind the primitive conditions under which the Base at Crepon in Normandy had had to work this seemed luxury indeed. Advantage was taken of the new situation to overhaul the Base Post Office organisation. Large quantities of stores were transferred

from Crepon to Antwerp and many men were quickly moved from one location to the other: all this without in any way upsetting the smooth day-to-day running of the postal organisation and services. At 0800 hrs. on the 26th September 8 Base Army Post Office closed in Crepon and reopened at the same time in Antwerp. The rear element of the Base in Crepon was at the same time re-titled "X" Base Post Office.

The end of September therefore found the Base postal organisation in the theatre with three separate elements. The main base - 8 BAPO - was well forward at Antwerp. Its job was to act as air and surface base for the forward formations and units, and as concentration office for air mail for all the British forces east of the Seine. Some 300 miles away at Crepon in Normandy was the Rear Base - "X" BAPO. Its job was to act as concentration office for surface mails for units west of the Seine, and for air mail as well as for units west of the Seine along with those served from the APOs at Rouen and Dieppe. About a third of the way up the L of C was the other section of the base organisation - 18 Advance Base Post Office at Dieppe. Its job was to act as concentration office for surface mail for British units east of the Seine.

Meanwhile, on the 25th September, the port of entry for the rearward area changed from Arromanches (the Mulberry) to the inland port of Caen.

These dispositions held good for no more than a month. Dieppe was not a very satisfactory port as a point of entry for surface mails for the forward areas and on the 21st October it ceased to be used. Instead Ostend was brought into use. 18 Base Post Office was transferred to that town and renamed, more correctly, 18 Postal Port Regulating Section. Unfortunately, owing to obstructions at the harbour entrance Ostend proved to be no more satisfactory a port than Dieppe and, during the stormy weather of November and December 1944, the mail ships were frequently prevented from entering and had to lie off shore for several days at a time. Some ships' masters were more skilled and daring than others and mails began arriving out of sequence. Right up to the end of the year there continued to be patchy hold ups in the arrival of surface mail. (They continued on and off until mid-February 1945 when, on the 15th February, the port of entry for sea-borne mails was changed again from Ostend to Calais. An all-weather berth was assigned to the mail boats and as a result delays stopped once and for all.)

At the UK end of the surface mail link, Southampton had been in use as outport for the whole theatre continuously since D Day. But on the 26th October 1944 the outport was changed to Tilbury. On the 7th November it was changed again, and finally, to Dover.

Concurrently with the move of the main Base from Normandy to Antwerp the administrative Headquarters - Rear HQ as it was known - of 21 Army Group, with its component Postal Directorate, moved from Vaucelles

(near Bayeux) to Brussels. The Location and Traffic sections of the Directorate closed at Vaucelles at 1200 hours on the 24th September and re-opened in premises on the Avenue Louise, Brussels, at 0001 hours on the 26th September.

The establishment of 8 Base APO - the main Base for the theatre - at Antwerp was in conformity with the general administrative policy of 21 Army Group. It was also thought to be a good choice from a postal standpoint. Antwerp seemed likely to be opened up as the theatre's major port and therefore the natural point of entry for surface mails. Similarly it seemed likely that its airfield would become the natural terminal for airmails. As it turned out it would have been better to have located the Base Post Office in Brussels rather than in Antwerp. Although Antwerp fell into British hands on the 4th September it was some time before it could be opened up as a port since the Germans controlled the approaches to it along the Scheldt. And even when the Scheldt was cleared it was decided by the Movements authorities not to bring the small coasters used for carrying mail into Antwerp; it would have taken 48 hours for them to negotiate the Escaut on each journey. Instead, as has earlier been recorded, it was found quicker once Dieppe was closed, to make Ostend (and later Calais) the port of entry for mail.

The fact that Brussels would have been a better choice than Antwerp as the site for the main Base APO was first demonstrated when it became clear that the town, the port, and the airfield, were to be under almost continuous enemy attack, first across the river by mortars and guns, and later by rocket weapons and pilotless aircraft. Any doubt as to which was the better choice was finally resolved when, as will later be recounted, the premises at Antwerp in which the Base was housed were destroyed by a V1 pilotless aircraft. Meanwhile Evere airfield, close to Brussels, had become the main airmail terminal for the theatre.

Two unusual and unexpected phenomena made their appearance soon after the Allied advance into Belgium and Holland. Pilfering of mail and losses at Field Post Office counters began to increase. Such thefts and losses had up to that point been almost negligible notwithstanding the adverse conditions under which the staffs at Army Post Offices had been working while in Normandy and during the advance through France. But with the employment in APS Sorting Offices, and at counters, of growing numbers of civilians recruited from the liberated territories losses took an upward turn. Stricter and more frequent checks were introduced as soon as it was realised what was going on and the trouble was quickly brought under control.

Much more striking than the upturn in losses was the sudden rocketing upwards of sales of Postal Orders from A/FPO counters.

Both these developments - the increase in losses and the upturn in Postal Order sales - were perhaps not surprising bearing in mind the

fact that during the German occupation large numbers of people in France and the Low countries had been driven to live by their wits and standards of morality had suffered a sharp decline. After the liberation the Black Market and other illicit money making activities sprang to life and flourished exceedingly. To take but one example, cigarettes were almost worth their weight in gold, and could be bartered for almost anything. Small fortunes were made from their sale and by other much more dubious methods. Whatever the method which was used to make money on the side, there was a method readily to hand whereby funds so acquired could be transferred to the UK. British and Canadian soldiers were quick to discover it. It lay in the simple Postal Order. Vast quantities were purchased at Army Post Offices before the higher authorities realised what was going on. It was barely possible to keep pace with the demand. Towards the end of November, however, instructions were issued by Headquarters 21 Army Group to the effect that from then on Postal Orders could only be purchased from FPOs on production of a certificate signed by an Officer. Sales of Postal Orders plummeted, but not so much as had been expected and even further restrictions had to be applied before remitting of funds by Postal Order was brought fully under control.

An account has already been given of the introduction of a milk-round airlift for letter mail by planes flying on a circuit UK - Brussels - Normandy - UK. This, and the use of properly constructed airfields, instead of the temporary landing strips of the beachhead era, led as might be expected to a noticeable improvement in the quality of the air mail services. What was exasperating to the APS however was the seeming inability of the planes carrying the mails to fly to a tight schedule. Once the timings for the milk-round airlift had been agreed with the RAF the postal planners expected that the timings would be adhered to, at least within an hour or so day in, day out. The fact that this did not happen and that mail might arrive at any odd hour between 1100 hrs. and 1800 hrs made both planning and operation of the intra-theatre mail links more than a little difficult.

But there was much greater exasperation when the onset of winter brought with it several nasty holdups, with flying suspended for up to 3 to 4 days at a time. When this happened the burning question whether or not to divert mail to the sea route haunted the lives of the Officers of the Army Postal Services who had the onerous responsibility for the decision. The exasperation would show itself most vividly when a cross-channel telephone call from a point on the Continent bathed in brilliant sunshine elicited the response from the UK end that there was unlikely to be any flying that day due to unfavourable weather conditions. There were one or two particularly bitter experiences when mail held up by no-flying conditions was diverted to the sea route only to be held up for two or three days of Ostend due to the difficulties there. It was finally decided that air mail would be diverted to the sea route only as a last resort when, say, as many as four days accumulation of mail was on hand at the UK airfield.

Perhaps the bitterest and most galling experience occurred at Christmas 1944 when a hold up in both air and surface mail for the theatre coincided with the German offensive in the Ardennes. For three to four days thick fog prevented all flying and at the same time seriously interfered with the sailings of the mail ships. By the 22nd of December four days backlog of airmail and newspapers had accumulated in the UK and a very serious hold up of surface mail arrivals had also occurred. The interruption of mail arrivals was serious enough in itself. Coinciding with the Ardennes offensive, and coming at the time of year when the volume of mail rose to three to four times normal, made the situation almost catastrophic. Providentially, on the 23rd December weather conditions suddenly improved; flying again became possible; and, on that day, four days accumulation of air mail was flown into the theatre in eight Dakotas. Almost at the same time some 150,000 bags of surface mail were unloaded at Ostend from several ships. The postal staff, which had already been augmented to cope with the Christmas rush by men borrowed from other units, had to be still further increased. It was a case of all hands to the pumps if ever there was one. But it was also an unprecedented challenge. Men got stuck into the job with a will and worked until through sheer exhaustion they could work no longer. A situation which at one time seemed so serious that nothing short of a miracle would resolve it, was in fact resolved by sheer hard work. All the mail on hand was delivered throughout the whole theatre by Christmas Day.

Up to this point references to the means used for moving the Army's mail have been confined almost exclusively to the air and surface links with the UK. But the establishment and maintenance of efficient intra-theatre links was of equal importance. Up to the end of 1944 these links were maintained exclusively by road transport and no history of the operations of the Army Postal Services in North West Europe would be complete without a reference to the development of the theatre's road mail transport services. Road services for the transport of mail between the Base installations and airfields and ports, and with the Armies, developed along conventional lines. But, in the case of the L of C, distances to be covered became so great, and increased at such a pace, that the road services had to be most carefully planned and efficiently operated to maintain a first class service. In this connection it is sometimes over-looked - though it should not be - that quite apart from the flow of correspondence between the theatre and the UK there was also a very large quantity of mail flowing within the theatre between Headquarters and units, and between units and formations themselves. The speedy transmission of this correspondence was of no little importance militarily. Known officially as cross-post the number of items of mail involved ran into tens of thousands daily. They were carried in large part by postal road transport service. Once the break-out occurred and the Armies moved up through France and into Belgium a new type of correspondence was generated - between the army on the one hand and civilians in the liberated territories on the other. This correspondence grew rapidly in volume until it formed a very significant part of the total mail handled by the Army Postal Service. It

was carried from point to point almost exclusively by the intra-theatre road mail transport services.

In the very early days, while the British and Canadian Forces were still confined to the Caen - Bayeux bridgehead, straight line short distance road transport services centred on the Base APO at Crepon were established to carry mails between the Base and the various "S" Offices. Direct road services between the Base and each Corps were also operated. But, as the Armies pushed forward, the direct Base - Corps links were abolished and the Corps Offices "roadheaded" on the Army Distribution Office, which was itself linked to the Base by direct road service.

After the crossing of the Seine an "S" Office was opened at Rouen and a direct road link between that office and the Base APO at Crepon established. Rouen was then made the road mail switching centre for the "S" Offices established progressively at Lisieux, Dieppe, Amiens, Evreux and, later, Paris. Road Transport links were established between each of these offices and the APO at Rouen.

With the liberation of Belgium and the establishment of "S" Offices as far forward as Antwerp, a "through" trunk road connection for mails between rear and forward areas was established. The long route was broken into sections, with relief drivers available at each staging point. Thus, Driver A ran from the Base at Crepon to Rouen: Driver B (after dropping and picking up mails for and from that point) took over Driver A's lorry, with its load, and drove it on to Amiens, where Driver C, acting in the same way, took it on to Brussels. The timetables had to be planned to ensure that the drivers were properly rested and the lorries satisfactorily maintained. The paramount requirement underlying the planning was that the services should run to a timetable which could be maintained without imposing impossible strains on men or vehicles. End to end the journey of about 300 miles was covered in under 24 hours - in itself no mean achievement having regard to the congestion on the roads running along the backbone of the Armies' advance. It may be of interest to mention in passing that the arrangement bore a close resemblance to the system of "Posts" operated in England with such success in mail coach days.

As the L of C tail "curled up" the centre of gravity of the L of C shifted from Rouen to Arras and the "S" Office at Arras then replaced Rouen as the Chief L of C switching centre, becoming the focus of the road services with Calais, Boulogne, Dieppe, Paris and so on. About the same time, L of C re-route centres were established to facilitate re-routing of mail which, following on a unit's change of location, continued to flow to the old office of service for a day or two. The Centres nominated for this purpose were 'X' Base Army Post Office at Crepon for the rearward area, 18 BAPO at Dieppe for the central L of C, 8 BAPO at Antwerp for the forward L of C, and the Army Depot for all units whose mail was routed via that Depot.

Towards the close of 1944 the scaling down of the Rear Maintenance Area had progressed so far that it was decided to make 8 BAPO the forward air and surface base for all offices north of the Seine, with 'X' BAPO left to function solely for the Rear Maintenance Area proper. This stage saw the introduction of fast road services for the carriage of letter mail and newspapers arriving by air from the UK, and also for intra-theatre mail (cross-post). The road services were planned and timed so that mail and newspapers arriving in the theatre on Day A could be delivered throughout the theatre not later than Day B. Day in, day out, this aim was achieved except when there was an interruption in service with the UK. The two principal road services were named after the rail Travelling Post Offices which for very many years have formed the backbone of the UK mail system, namely, the Up and Down Specials which run overnight between London and Glasgow and which have a long established reputation for good time-keeping. The army lorries used to operate the road services were equipped to the front with illuminated signs giving the description of the service - "UP SPECIAL", "DOWN SPECIAL", "ARRAS LIMITED UP", and "ARRAS LIMITED DOWN".

By way of interest the timings to which the drivers of these four trunk road services were geared are given here:

	<u>Route</u>		<u>Timings</u>
"DOWN SPECIAL"	Brussels airfield	dep	1500hrs.
	Amiens	arr	2100hrs.
		dep	2200hrs.
	Rouen	arr	0300hrs.
"UP SPECIAL"	Rouen	dep	1500hrs.
	Amiens	arr	1830hrs.
		dep	1900hrs.
	Arras	arr	2100hrs.
		dep	2200hrs.
	Antwerp	arr	0330hrs.
"ARRAS LIMITED UP"	Arras	dep	2000hrs.
	Lille	arr	2200hrs.
		dep	2230hrs.
	Antwerp	arr	0200hrs.
"ARRAS LIMITED DOWN"	Brussels airfield	dep	1500hrs.
	Lille	arr	1830hrs.
		dep	1900hrs.
	Arras	arr	2030hrs.

The RASC Officer and drivers who operated the services for the APS took a keen personal interest in them and maintained the services at a high degree of efficiency. Each driver took it as a personal challenge to see that his lorry ran strictly to schedule come hell or high water.

And, somehow, no matter how bad the weather or the road conditions, the vans seemed to get through on time. It was said at the time that onlookers could reliably set their watches by the time at which the "Up Sepcial" or the "Arras Limited" went by. Whether this is true or not, their reliability and the speed with which the services were operated won for them a reputation long to be remembered.

The planning of the "through" trunk road connections between the Base and the forward areas, later to be developed into the "Up" and "Down" Specials, was done jointly by Major E W Shepherd (then with HQ 21 Army Group) and Major J C Cashin (then DADAPS, L of C). Responsibility for ensuring that the road services worked to plan, day in, day out, rested with Major Cashin - he discharged that responsibility in an altogether noteworthy manner, inspiring both the lorry drivers and the men who loaded and unloaded them to carry out their tasks with a degree of efficiency beyond praise.

The last three months of 1944 provided an opportunity to deal with one or two problems which had had to be put aside under the pressure of rapidly moving events but which needed to be dealt with as soon as an opportunity presented itself. There were also some new problems to be resolved. Some of the former were of a technical character and little need be said about them here. But by way of example brief reference will be made to one of them, namely the need for revision of the arrangements for sorting and despatching correspondence posted in the theatre for delivery in the UK. The object of any such revision must be to make the sorting process as swift and accurate as it can be and, at the same time, to accelerate the delivery of correspondence to the maximum practicable extent. Those readers who are technically minded will find a note of what was arranged at Appendix M. Suffice it here to say that this revision saw the introduction of what was known as a 72 box primary - as compared with the 48 box primary used by the GPO. In one sense this was a step back in time for over the years the GPO had moved away from a 72 box to a 48 box primary for reasons which need not be given here. The judgement of the postal planners in 21 Army Group was that a 72 box primary speeded up the sorting process without any measurable loss of accuracy. There are those who would hold to that judgement even today.

Another matter which called for early action in the closing months of 1944 was that of regularising the arrangement for dealing with mail passing between the Allied armies and the liberated territories. So long as these armies were confined to the Normandy bridgehead the volume of correspondence passing between the troops and the indigenous population was insignificant and there was no need for regularising the arrangements for dealing with it. The need did not arise in any acute sense even when the British Forces were well into France, mainly because the pace of the advance was such as to arrest communication with the liberated populations, at least for some time. But as soon as the advance came almost to a halt the volume of mail passing between the

troops and civilians in the liberated territories began to grow at a tremendous pace. Negotiations with the Civil Postal Administrations (the French, Belgian and Dutch P.T.T.) were begun and points for the exchange of mail between the Allied Armies on the one hand and the Civil Postal Administrations on the other were agreed and the necessary transfer arrangements made. The agreed points of transfer were Paris (APO S.720) for France; Brussels (APO S.717) for Belgium; and, at a later stage, Eindhoven (APO S.116) for the liberated areas of Holland.

Still another problem arose as the Allied Armies advanced through the Low Countries. Not long after the British Forces entered Holland it was decided by SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) to form large numbers of units from Allied liberated manpower -- French, Belgian and Dutch. As a considerable proportion of these units were to operate with or under command of 21 Army Group, and as there were no Allied Army Postal organisations in existence at the time, it was decided that the new units should be served postally by the British Army Postal Services and that they should use, at least at the outset, the 'B.L.A.' address. Service was provided through the Field Post Offices of the Formations - Armies or L of C - with which the units were operating. It was however considered necessary to have a Belgian and Dutch element at the British Base Post Office (8 B.A.P.O), and also on the Staff of the Postal Directorate, and this was arranged. By the end of 1944 appreciable numbers of these Allied units had been brought on to postal location and were being served through British Army Postal channels.

Although it had been decided during the OVERLORD planning period that, for the first few months at any rate, a telegraph service between the B.L.A. and the UK would offer so little advantage over the normal air mail service as not to be warranted, the question of inaugurating such a service immediately became a live issue once UK leave for the troops was started at the end of December 1944. There were no cable facilities available for operation of the service. Instead it was decided to improvise and, in the last few days of 1944, a hybrid service was introduced whereby troops who were about to go on privilege leave to the UK at short notice might send a telegram to the UK advising their relatives and friends of their impending arrival. The telegrams were handed in at Field Post Offices and charged at UK inland rates. They were conveyed to the UK by APS couriers travelling by plane to Northolt. On arrival in the UK the couriers handed over their telegrams to the GPO Central Telegraph Office for onward transmission by wire to the addressees. The arrangement worked well and seemed to satisfy the users. It continued in operation for some months until the introduction of a full telegraph service became a practical proposition. It was but one more instance in which the Army Postal Services had been able to meet a pressing need in an unusual but satisfying efficient manner.

From D Day on, through the summer and autumn months and into the winter, there had been no break at all for the Officers and men of the Army

Postal Services in North West Europe. The shortage of trained men was so acute as to make it impossible to pull men, not so much "out of the line" as "out of the Field Post Offices" for a rest. Each man had to continue at work and this was accepted albeit with the usual soldiers grumble but nonetheless cheerfully. The first break came on Christmas Day 1944 when, after the delivery had "gone out" it was down tools for 24 hours. The break was well earned.



(Above, left) The Letter Sorting Office at 8 Base APO in Brussels. (Above, right) Unloading parcel mails into the Parcel Section of 102 L of C Postal Depot in Brussels
(Below) The author, senior NCOs and some of the Belgian employees of 8 Base APO in Brussels



CHAPTER VI

THE RHINE CROSSING: VICTORY IN EUROPE: OCCUPATION

The opening days of 1945 saw the German offensive in the Ardennes losing momentum. The American First and Third Armies counter attacked. By mid-January the Germans were on the retreat and fighting a steady rear-guard action back to the defences of the Siegfried line. The Battle of the Bulge was over. The Germans had failed to achieve their objectives and instead were on the retreat and had suffered losses they could ill afford. On the other hand their offensive had delayed the Allies' advance to the Rhine: indeed it was February before the Americans regained the positions they had been holding six weeks earlier.

In the next stage of operations - aimed primarily at envelopment of the Ruhr, Germany's arsenal - the Allied armies set out to destroy the main German forces west of the Rhine and to close up to that river. By March 23rd they had not only done this but had brought up to dumps on the west bank of the lower Rhine, 250,000 tons of ammunition, stores and bridging equipment. During the night of the 23rd, after a crushing bombardment from 3300 guns concentrated on a front of 25 miles, two British and two American Divisions began to cross the Rhine and soon were moving inland from the east bank of the river. On the morning of the 24th the assault was reinforced by two airborne Divisions - 6th British and 17th U.S. - which descended in the middle of the enemy defences. By the evening of 28th March a bridgehead 35 miles wide and 20 miles deep had been secured on the east bank of the Rhine. That night the German resistance snapped and General Montgomery's armies broke out into the Wesphalian plain. The way was open to the Elbe. First Canadian Army turned north to cut off the Germans in West Holland and to clear the Frisian coast. Second British and Ninth U.S. Army began to drive hard for the line of the River Elbe so as to gain quick possession of the plains of Northern Germany.

The area between the Rhine and the Elbe was intersected by innumerable waterways, including such major obstacles as the Ems and Weser rivers and the Dortmund-Ems and Ems-Weser canals. Over 500 bridges had to be constructed in the course of the advance, the German skill in demolitions being as marked as ever. On the 18th April Luneburg fell to the British 11th Armoured Division and on the next day that Division reached the Elbe.

Following a short pause for the build up of supplies, more particularly bridging equipment, Second Army attacked across the Elbe the aim being to advance to the Baltic, cut off Schleswig Holstein and Denmark, and proceed to seize the Kiel Canal and the north west German ports. By the 3rd May all this had been achieved, Lubeck and Hamburg had surrendered without a fight, and contact had been made with the Russians advancing from the east.

At 1820 hrs. on the 4th May a German delegation which had arrived at the Tactical Headquarters of Field Marshal Montgomery on Luneburg Heath signed an Instrument of Surrender of "all German armed forces in HOLLAND in north west Germany including all islands, and in DENMARK". All hostilities by German Forces in the foregoing areas ceased at 0800 hrs. on Saturday the 5th May 1945.

On 9th May Field Marshal Keitel, for the German High Command, signed a formal ratification of surrender of all the German Armed Forces, in Berlin. The war in Europe was over.

With the cessation of hostilities the task of 21 Army Group was completed. Its component Formations were next deployed within the British Zone of Occupation as a Military Government. So, while the machinery of the Control Commission for Germany was being set up, the Army was called upon to shoulder the responsibilities of government in an area as big as England and with a population of some 20 millions. Order had to be produced from chaos and life in Germany restarted.

On Saturday the 25th August 1945 21 Army Group ceased to exist as such and the British Forces in North West Europe became known as the "British Army of the Rhine."

Postally the early months of 1945 brought something of a lull after the hectic days of the previous year. They provided opportunity to smooth out the various parts of the postal organisation and, where possible, to increase the speed and efficiency of the services. Instead of improvised Field Post Offices in hole-and-corner premises, offices which would have done credit to any town in the UK began to appear. Counters with locked drawers and safes began to replace trestle tables with deed boxes on top. Counter screens began to appear. Pride in appearance and efficiency became the order of the day. Services between the theatre and the UK were steadily improved the continuing aim being to put them on a basis in which they would operate day in day out with clockwork regularity. During January and early February bad flying conditions led to a number of short breaks in the day-to-day regularity of the air mail services. But these were never so serious as to justify a change from the policy of adherence to air conveyance come what may. In fact it was during this period that there were more interruptions in the surface mail service than there were in the air mail service. Then, on 15th February 1945, as has already been mentioned, the port of entry for seaborne mails was changed from Ostend to Calais and an all-weather berth at Calais was assigned for use of the mail boats. This change brought about a radical and lasting improvement in the quality and reliability of the sea-borne services. On the same date - 15th February - a special postal train was brought into use for the conveyance of surface mails between Calais and Bourg Lepold (Belgium). The train stopped at various intermediate distribution and collection points to off-load and take on board mails. The successful working of this train service made a marked contribution to the maintenance

of a swift and regular parcel mail service between the theatre and UK. It also enabled substantial reductions to be made in the amount of motor transport used for the conveyance of mail. The terminal rail-head for this train was later extended to Mill and still later to Bedburg.

While 21 Army Group was closing up to the Lower Rhine in readiness for a major attempt to force a crossing, an incident occurred which might have had very serious consequences for the Army Postal Services in the theatre in terms of loss of manpower and services. On the 8th March a VI pilotless aircraft fell immediately outside the premises in Antwerp which housed the Base Post Office (8 B.A.P.O.). The explosion shattered the building and reduced the interior of the premises to rubble. Letters and parcels which were in process of sorting were either destroyed outright or blown out of the premises into the surrounding streets from which one by one they had to be, and were, recovered. Miraculously, apart from shock, casualties were limited to one of the Belgian civilian employees who was, unfortunately, badly injured.

The Antwerp premises being a complete write-off, steps were immediately taken to ensure the maintenance of the theatre's primary mail services with the UK by opening up a new Base in requisitioned premises (a Phillips factory) in Brussels. The staff employed at the Base rose to the emergency. Officers, men, and civilian employees worked without break until the services were restored. As a result there was no break at all in the services to and from the UK, delay to intra-theatre mail was limited to 2-3 days, and the loss of mail as a result of the VI explosion was insignificant.

It may be interesting to remark in passing how some of the dogma of the 1914-18 Army Postal Service lingered on into the 1945 war. The establishment of the Base in Brussels saw the final death of one of these, namely that the Base Army Post Office should be established at the "Port of Entry", whether or not this would be the best for purely postal considerations. This overlooked the fact that unless the Base Post Office was actually on the quayside so that the ships' derricks could swing the mail into it, the mail had to be loaded on lorries. Once this was done it did not matter, within reason, how far they travelled if there were a location away from the port which was more suitable from a postal standpoint.

Meanwhile, in order to increase the strength of the Formations under command 21 Army Group and now lining up along the Lower Rhine, it was decided by SHAEF to transfer troops from Italy to 21 Army Group. The transfer operation - known by the rather surprising name GOLDFLAKE - began on the 18th February and went on until the second week in April. The Formations moved comprised 1st Canadian Corps complete and 5 British Infantry Division - altogether a force of the same size as the original assault forces for OVERLORD. The whole operation was planned in a matter of twelve days. Movement was by road and rail from Marseilles to dispersal points in Belgium. The rail journey took three days and the

and the road journey five. Staging camps were set up at points en route and HQ 9 L of C Sub-Area was moved to Paris to administer the operation. From a postal point of view there was nothing of particular difficulty about the operation - it was fundamentally a locations exercise. The transferred formations had their own Field Post Offices which they took with them from Italy to Germany. Mail deliveries were made to them up to the time at which they began to move from Italy and each formation found mail waiting for it when it arrived in 21 Army Group. Posting facilities were available at each of the staging camps. There were no hitches in the postal arrangements and no complaints about the service provided.

At 2100 hrs on 23rd March four battalions of the 51st (Highland) Division began to cross the Rhine which, at the point of crossing, was about four to five hundred yards wide. Seven minutes later the first wave of infantry reported that it had reached the east bank. Operation PLUNDER - designed to isolate the Ruhr from the rest of Germany and to break out into the North German plain - had begun. Next day came operation VARSITY when 14,000 troops dropped by parachute and glider on the east side of the Rhine, seizing virtually all their objectives. The next few days saw some heavy fighting but, on 28 March, 8 and 12 British Corps, with 18 U.S. Airborne Corps began to make rapid advances. The break-out from the Rhine bridgehead had occurred. The advance of the Allied armies was not halted again for more than a few days here and there until it came finally to rest with the German surrender on Luneburg Heath.

From a postal point of view - as from the administrative point of view generally - the operations east of the Rhine from the crossing up to VE Day were, relatively speaking, much simpler than the break out from Normandy and the pursuit across France and Belgium had been. The Base organisation behind both the British and Canadian armies was well developed. The lessons of the advance through France and Belgium had been put to good account. The L of C postal organisation had been greatly augmented. Transport resources were, if anything, more than adequate. The surface mail services through Calais were functioning with almost clockwork regularity. So were the airmail services. Liaison arrangements between the Army Postal Services and the RAF transport organisation had been developed to a point where any requests for changes in airlift were met by the latter with all speed and without hitch. Thus, as the advance up to, across, and beyond the Rhine went on, the airfields for the despatch and receipt of letter mails between the UK and Second Army were changed in conformity with the general forward movement. Airfields at HELMOND, HEES, RHEINE, DIEPHOLZ and LUNEBURG were successively brought into use. The airfield which was finally to become the main air mail terminal in Germany was BUCKEBURG. Surface mails for which Calais was the inport/outport were transferred between that port and the Rhine by rail. But, as the railway bridges over the Rhine had been destroyed, conveyance between the railhead and the Army Postal Depots, and thence to the advancing spearhead formations, had of

necessity to be by road. Later, when the railway communications across the river were restored, a mail train was operated between Calais and Herford in each direction to a daily schedule. But by that time the war was virtually over.

Concurrently with the planning for the crossing of the Rhine and the advance into Germany went planning for the post-hostilities occupation of Germany - code named operation ECLIPSE. Taking first priority in this planning were measures to deal with the evacuation of Allied Prisoners of War (PW) and of Displaced Persons (DPs). Postally the measures needed and provided were almost entirely confined to the supply of UK newspapers and the provision of facilities for posting mail, sending telegrams, and so on. No special difficulties were met with and the facilities provided, although obviously much appreciated by the recipients, evoked little comment - almost invariably a clear sign, with postal facilities, that the arrangements have worked smoothly and efficiently.

It might have been thought that the cessation of hostilities would bring an end to, or at least a slackening of the flow of problems which had been arising one after another since planning for OVERLORD first started. But this was far from being the case. Some relatively long standing problems remained to be solved: some entirely new ones arose with the end of the fighting. Some of the new ones indeed served to make some of the old problems even more acute. Since a number of these problems, and not least the solutions found for them, were unique this history might be regarded in some quarters as incomplete without a reference to them.

For some time prior to the end of hostilities the staffing of the Base Post Office in Brussels had been giving cause for anxiety. The Commanding Officer had several times reported that he had insufficient experienced postal staff at his disposal to allow of his maintaining the scheduled, i.e. the proper quality of service, for cross-post and intra-theatre correspondence. Unfortunately, there was little or nothing which could be done to augment the experienced staff. Every man was wanted to man the chain of Field Post Offices which now stretched from Normandy to Brussels and on to the Rhine and into Germany - not to mention all the outlying ones in places like Dieppe, Ostend, Calais and so on. The regular staff at the Base in Brussels had, of course, been augmented by civilians recruited locally and the quality of staff so recruited was undoubtedly good. But, good as they were, they were unfamiliar with unit designations as used in the British Army. In particular they were unfamiliar with the countless abbreviations of unit titles which the British public seem to delight in and which they are more than a little adept in devising.

It needs to be explained at this point that, up to 1945, all sorting of correspondence within the British Army Postal organisation had, from time immemorial, been organised on what was known as an "Arm of Service" basis. Thus, correspondence for the Forces abroad, posted

in the UK and circulated by the GPO to the Home Postal Depot at Nottingham, was there sorted first according to the Arm of Service to which each unit belonged - Infantry, RAC, RAMC, RASC, REME, and so on. After this first sorting the next sorting was down to the individual units or groups of units within the particular Arm of Service Thus a letter addressed:

12345 Pte T Smith
789 General Transport Company RASC
B.L.A.

would be sorted first to the R.A.S.C. Division, then to a "General Transport Company" section within the RASC Division, and finally to the 789 General Transport Company box.

There was no particular difficulty about this method of sorting provided the Arm of Service was included by the sender in the unit designation, and provided the title of the unit was not abbreviated too severely. In practice senders frequently omitted the Arm of Service and abbreviated the title of the unit, so that letters for 12345 Pte T. Smith might well turn up at the Home Postal Depot at Nottingham, or in the Base Post Office at Bruseels, addressed thus:

12345 Pte T. Smith
789 G.T. Coy
B.L.A.

A Post Office trained sorter at Nottingham could be expected to know that a letter so addressed should be sorted first to the RASC Division. But a Belgian civilian sorter employed in the Base APO at Brussels might be forgiven for failing to recognise that "789 G.T. Coy" meant "789 General Transport Company RASC" and that it should be sorted accordingly.

The net effect of the Belgian employees' unfamiliarity with the title of British units, their Arms of Service, and the generality of abbreviations was a slow down in the rate of sorting and an increase in the number of items put aside for separate treatment or sent to the wrong unit because the sorter did not recognise the unit or its arms of service. This may not sound of any great consequence to the uninformed reader. But when hundreds of thousands of items are being dealt with daily a second or so extra handling time on each item can have serious consequences from both a service and staffing point of view.

There was an answer to the problem at hand. Strangely enough it seemed that it had never been tried before. It was decided to put it to the test at the Base APO at Brussels. The answer was to change over from sorting by Arms of Service to sorting according to the numbers in the titles of units. The new system was styled numerical sorting. Under

the numerical system a unit like the 789 General Transport Coy RASC was first sorted on the basis of the number in its designation - 789 - instead of on the basis of its arm of service - RASC. The primary sorting fittings were broken down into a convenient (technically - weighted) number of divisions e.g. 0 - 9; 10 - 39; 40 - 69; 70 - 99; 100 - 149; and so on. Thus, letters for the unit taken as our example would be sorted to the "750 - 799" division. Within the numerical primary divisions there was further breakdown, again by unit numbers, until finally the correspondence was broken down to individual units. It is true that under the numerical system of sorting the sorter making the final sub-division could well have to sort out letters for a dozen or so units all having the same number in the unit title e.g.

789 General Transport Coy RASC
789 Pioneer Coy
789 Field Ambulance RAMC
789 Command Workshops REME
789 General Hospital RAMC
789 Field Coy RE

and so on. This presented no great problem, because all these items came to one point - the 789 sorting position - where the staff could be specialised to a high degree. There remained the clear advantage of the numerical over the arm of service sorting system viz that, whereas correspondents might well omit the arm of service, or abbreviate the unit name when writing the address on letters, they would invariably include the number of the unit. This made numerical sorting much simpler and surer than sorting by arm of service.

Putting the numerical sorting system to the test at the Base APO at Brussels necessitated a root and branch reorganisation of the Base sorting office - a reorganisation which had to be carried out without interruption of service. Following the most careful planning and preparation the changeover was made without a hitch. Within a matter of hours the new sorting process had settled down and was proceeding more smoothly, more surely, and more speedily than the old arm of service system. It was popular with the sorters. Sorting by numbers had come to stay.

The success of the numerical system of sorting led to a further refinement known as "Decimal Sorting". The idea for this came from the same individual as had evolved the pre-location system in the planning period namely, Col. Smith who had by this time succeeded Col. Roberts as DDAPS, HQ 21 Army Group. Whereas the ordinary numerical system made use of a 72 box sorting frame, the 'Decimal' system made use of a frame of 80 boxes arranged in eight rows of ten one above the other. The position of a box in the horizontal row represented the last digit of the unit number due to be sorted to it, while down the left hand side of the frame was a strip which showed the initial digits of the unit numbers due to be sorted to each row. The system was infinitely

flexible and could be set up to meet the needs of any situation. It was so simple to use that completely untrained staff could reach high sorting speeds after practising for only an hour or two. It was first tried out at Herford in Germany where a new Base installation - 101 Zone Postal Depot - had been set up in a furniture factory not long after the cessation of hostilities. Introduced in October 1945 the 'decimal' sorting system proved to be an immediate success and it paved the way for a takeover of sorting work from the UK as will shortly be described. For the benefit of the technically minded reader a comparison of the two systems of sorting by unit numbers is given at Appendix N.

Not long after the end of the war in Europe the subject of demobilisation came to the fore. Pressure for early release of as many soldiers as possible was mounted. In turn, these pressures added urgency to steps which were already in progress, such as the winding up of the Army's tail; disbandment of as many units as possible; and the settling down of the remainder in the British Zone of Germany. The pressures produced by the call for early demobilisation were felt not only in Germany but in the UK too and not least at the Home Postal Depot at Nottingham.

It was decided amongst other things to build up the Zone Postal Depot at Herford (Germany) and concurrently to run down the Base APO at Brussels transferring the work handled by the latter in stages to the former. Finally 8 Base APO at Brussels was closed and the zone Postal Depot became the main Base APO for the B.A.O.R. The build up of the Zone Postal Depot was accompanied by a whole series of administrative problems. Some of these were unique and a brief reference to one or two of them may be of interest. German Civilian labour became the main component of the Zone Postal Depot staffing. The German civilian transport system was in chaos and in most places non-existent. The Zone Postal Depot was forced to operate its own "bus" services to get its civilian employees to and from work. The German food supply system had virtually collapsed. Such food supplied as there was were strictly rationed and many items of food were very hard to come by. The German civilian employees of the Zone Postal Depot were literally starving - so much so that on every 8 hour shift quite a number would collapse from exhaustion and have to be taken home or to hospital. Two army lorries were in fact kept on standby throughout the 24 hours to act as ambulances. It was impossible for the Zone Postal Depot to carry on for very long on this basis and after a time it was decided to provide a mid-shift meal for the German civilian employees to be eaten on the premises. Once this was done the efficiency of the Zone Postal Depot improved out of all recognition. With the decimal sorting system in operation and functioning smoothly and efficiently the way was open for a much needed step, namely the take-over from the Home Postal Depot in Nottingham (now under growing strain through loss of trained staff on demobilisation) of the work of sorting UK posted correspondence addressed "BAOR". The take-over was an operation requiring much detailed

planning and careful execution. But it passed off without a hitch and without any interruption in the service. From this time on all mail addressed "BAOR" was sent by the GPO in the UK to Herford in Germany without any prior sorting. The Zone Postal Depot thus became a major installation. At its peak it was handling every day over $\frac{1}{4}$ million letters, 35,000 packets, 11,000 registered items and 12,000 parcels (sorted on a gravity system). Something like 1200 staff were employed - over 250 British soldiers (the backbone of the unit), 150 Belgian and 800 German civilian sorters.

During the immediate post-hostilities period the intra-theatre mail communication linkages were overhauled and improved. In particular, rail sorting carriages were requisitioned from the Bundespost and rail Travelling Post Offices running Dusseldorf - Herford - Hamburg (in both directions) introduced specifically for the carriage of Army mail.

Following the take-over of the sorting of UK posted correspondence by the Zone Postal Depot, and the introduction of the Travelling Post Offices, the quality of service reached its zenith. This was true of the UK - BAOR - UK services as it was true of the intra-theatre (cross-post) services. Complaints of delay were virtually non-existent.

Meanwhile a new kind of service was inaugurated known as the "Postagram" service. It was intended to meet the need for a service whereby urgent and also "greetings" messages could be transmitted between the theatre and the UK. Messages for the UK written on a telegraph message form were handed in by Post Orderlies to Army Post Offices whence they were transmitted by wire or post to the Zone Postal Depot. The Zone Postal Depot had direct teleprinter connections with the Central Telegraph Office in London, and Postagrams transmitted over these circuits therefore went to their destination in the UK "by wire all the way". Postagrams received in the Zone Postal Depot from the UK were transmitted to Army Post Offices and thence phoned to units, a confirmatory copy of the Postagram being handed to the unit Post Orderly when next he called at the appropriate Army Post Office.

The Postagram service worked very well from the start and was the subject of much favourable comment.

There is little more of moment to record in relation to events associated with the military campaign in North West Europe. The British Armed Forces with their component postal organisation were destined to remain in Germany for many years to come. But 1945 might be said to mark the end of an era of a campaign. The ending of a campaign almost invariably brings with it a sense of anti-climax. Perhaps this was not so acute with the North West Europe campaign as with many others in which British Forces had been involved. There were so many problems arising from the occupation of a country like Western Germany as to preclude a slackening of tempo. Many of them called for urgent resolution. For the postal staffs at least there was little or no time

to spend on reflection. Demobilisation went on pretty well in parallel with the resolution of these problems and every day added to them. The advent of the control Commission for Germany brought further work - and problems - in its train. But despite the constant pre-occupation with everyday affairs, the beginning of demobilisation brought with it the inescapable knowledge that the old order was changing, giving place to new. 1945 was in fact the beginning of the end of an era which would for ever remain in the memory of the participants. Disputes, disagreements, arguments, there had been in plenty. But, as the ranks thinned out with the departure of those demobilised, there remained the knowledge that virtually all the disputation and argument had had but one purpose, namely, to further the success of an unique military adventure - the greatest combined operation of all time - Operation OVERLORD.



At Calais, unloading mails for the BLA from the mail boat
and loading the postal train using French labour

CHAPTER VII

LOOKING BACK

"There were giants in the earth in those daysmighty men which were of old, men of renown."

- Genesis 6.4

It is generally accepted that old soldiers are prone to reminisce about their war-time experiences - often to the ill-concealed annoyance of those who have never shared such experiences. The title of this chapter may tempt the reader to suppose that the author is about to succumb to the old soldier's weakness. To that extent the reader who has come thus far may, at this point, be disposed to put aside this history and 'call it a day'. The purpose of this chapter however, is not to reminisce in a personal sense, but rather to refer to one or two aspects of the postal history of OVERLORD which it would be out of place to deal with in any detail in the synoptic account of events, but which would leave the history incomplete and to some extent lifeless if they were omitted.

Few who took part in the postal operations connected with OVERLORD could forget the three Officers who, perhaps more than others, left an indelible stamp upon the campaign. This is not to under-rate in any way the value of the individual contributions made by a thousand others, each in his niche doing an indispensable job, and doing it well. Names like Cousins, Smith, Menzies, Upton, Young, Appleby and a host of others will forever remain in the memory of the author as men who, whether Sapper or Staff Sergeant, worked till they were flat out, often under trying conditions making, in their own particular sphere, their special contribution, and making it cheerfully and efficiently.

But the overall character of the planning and execution of the OVERLORD postal arrangements was evolved first and last under the direction and influence of three men - Colonels Roberts, Drew and Smith. They worked, of course, under the general oversight of the War Office (DAPS), and in collaboration with colleagues in Home Commands. But these three were the men who, more than any others, conceived the plans, developed them, and then saw to their execution. During the key periods of the campaign Col. Roberts was in overall command, Lt.Col. Drew was his deputy, and Lt.Col. Smith was in command of the postal organisation of Second Army.

At the outbreak of war Col. Roberts was a Post Office Surveyor - one of those officials who for many years had held almost absolute sway over the work of the Post Office outside London. The descendants of

Anthony Trollope, the Surveyors were once described as "Monarchs of all they surveyed" and the description was not very wide of the mark. Fearless and autocratic, their first loyalty was to the Post Office which they served with selfless devotion. They ordered its affairs and saw that it functioned with a unique degree of efficiency. The grade ceased to exist during the war when the Post Office was "regionalised". Col. Roberts was true to type. He joined the Forces immediately on the outbreak of war although at the time he was 51 years of age. Fearless in relation to both persons and circumstances, he was outspoken and never hesitant in expressing a point of view which he felt needed to be stated. His first concern was for the service, and his next for his men who he was at all times ready to stand up for whenever the circumstances justified his doing so. As a Staff Officer he never allowed a policy of getting out and seeing for himself what was happening on the ground. From March 1941 to August 1943, when he was recalled to join the newly formed Headquarters 21 Army Group, he served with distinction in the Middle East. But it was in the planning and execution of the postal arrangements for OVERLORD that his best remembered work was done. Partly on account of his experience and his "elder statesman" air, and partly on account of his crisp and "to the point" manner of speaking, he quickly established himself in the eyes of the senior Staff Officers in 21 Army Group and was generally held by them in high regard, tinged it would possibly be true to say with a measure of affection. In those who worked for him - "his boys" as he so often called them - he inspired a singular devotion. Though they might often argue furiously with him, and sometimes refer in explosive terms to something which "Willie" (as he was often disrespectfully referred to) - had said to them, they were always ready to acknowledge that he was "the Chief" and to give him everything they had to offer in the way of work. When, at the age of 57, he was "demobbed" there was a real sense of personal loss felt by everyone who knew him in B.A.O.R. His services to the Army were finally acknowledged when he was made a C.B.E. A great character in every sense of the word and one whose name will always be associated with the postal aspects of OVERLORD.

Contrasting strikingly with Col. Roberts in many ways was his deputy, Lt. Col. J N Drew. At the outbreak of war he, too, was a member of the Post Office Surveying grade - an Assistant Surveyor - and an Officer of the Army Supplementary Reserve. Known to all and sundry by his second name - Norris - he was powerfully built and possessed of a most awe-inspiring 'handle-bar' moustache. It might be said that in many respects he was born and bred for an Army career. Indeed, after the war, he took up a Regular Army Commission culminating in his appointment as Director of Army Postal Services in 1960. Lt. Col. Drew flourished in a military atmosphere. This was no mean asset. He was on "old boy" terms with many of the senior Staff Officers in 21 Army Group and, within reason, could generally secure from the Staff whatever assistance was needed by the postal organisation.

Universally popular with all ranks he was nonetheless of a somewhat choleric disposition and his tendency to "explode" when something was not to his liking, or when something went wrong, was well known to all his subordinates. They knew full well that there was no venom in the explosions and that all that was necessary was to follow the standard drill - lie low or better still keep out of the way until the storm had blown itself out. It was the very forcefulness which Drew brought to his work and to the achievement of his objectives that served him - and the postal services - so well in 21 Army Group. Once it was demonstrated that something needed to be done, or that an objective needed to be secured, Norris Drew would go all out to secure it, letting nothing stand in the way. Those who witnessed the occasions when, from somewhere in Normandy, he vented his wrath by cross-channel phone on someone in the UK who showed signs of not coming up to scratch can never forget the scene. The mind went out in sympathy to the hapless individual back home who was fated to tell an irate Col. Drew for example that there might well be no flying and therefore no mail that day. The lines positively sizzled - the more so when although the weather on the UK airfield might be bad, the weather in Normandy was glorious. In such circumstances an "unsatisfactory" call was liable to produce an atmosphere which was positively electric and it was not unknown for the tension to be broken by the emergence from the Colonel's tent of an offending telephone in the form of a high speed missile. If anyone was capable of getting mail planes off the ground by sheer force of personality it was Lt. Col. Drew. Choleric, bucolic, tempestuous he might be. But he was just the man for the job. His wartime services brought him a Mention in Despatches and an OBE.

The third member of the triumvirate - Lt. Col. C.R. Smith - was a unique character in more senses than one. An Assistant Principal in Post Office Headquarters at the outbreak of war he was also on the Army Supplementary Reserve of Officers. Possessed of an unusually agile mind he was capable of a remarkable clarity of thought and expression and an ability to reduce the most complex issues to simple propositions. These characteristics were to take him after the war to a Directorship in the Post Office and, finally, to the top job in his own creation - the National Data Processing Service.

The first signs that here was someone out of the ordinary became apparent in 1942 - 43 when he was DADAPS South Eastern Command at the time when "Monty" was the General at South Eastern Command Headquarters. Smith's directives to the Postal Officers in SECO became a by-word for clarity and pungency of expression. But his gifts were to be applied with maximum effect within 21 Army Group where he was responsible for a whole range of innovations - perhaps the most outstanding being the pre-location scheme described in a previous chapter of this history. The instructions to Postal Officers in Second Army - which he himself generally drafted - were relatively few in number. They were couched in the simplest of language and were indisputably clear in intention.

More often than not they were embellished with figures of speech which were strikingly illustrative of the subject. Soon after taking up his appointment as ADAPS Second Army he set the tone for postal planning with a short and pithy instruction to his subordinate Postal Officers. Referring to the operation which everyone knew was to come he said:

"The operation we are anticipating will be without doubt the greatest and most difficult of all time. Napoleon funk'd it and so did Hitler, both under more favourable conditions than face us. Therefore there is no room for facile optimism or careless slapdash thinking. Every detail must be thought over, cross-checked, and correlated with levels above and below."

Tall, and well built though stooping slightly, he was known to all and sundry as "The Smudger". He never suffered fools gladly and many unfortunates felt the whiplash of his tongue. His immediate subordinates found him a trifle wearing and those who were with him in the beachhead will not quickly forget his habit of sitting up, into the small hours of the morning, discussing the events of the day and outlining his plans for the day shortly to dawn. Notwithstanding all these "difficulties" those who managed to survive his abrasiveness developed a remarkable affection and loyalty towards him. It was difficult to do otherwise. The stamp which he left on the planning and execution of the postal services in OVERLORD was indelible.

It would be quite wrong to assume from what has been said that the members of the "triumvirate" were the only officers serving with the R.E. (P.S.) in North West Europe who made a distinctively outstanding contribution to the planning and execution of the postal arrangements for OVERLORD. It would be just as wrong to assume that they were the only "characters" who will be remembered not only for their work but for their distinctive features and idiosyncrasies. There were, indeed, others almost too numerous to mention who made their own special contribution to the success of the Operation and whose names will long be remembered by those who worked with them or for them. Major Cashin, who served both with 8 Corps and on the L of C, and who rejoiced in the Christian name of 'James Caesar' was undoubtedly "one on his own". Stern and forbidding in exterior, yet capable of evoking a remarkable degree of loyalty amongst those who worked for him, he made a unique contribution to the work and was held in high regard by the Staff Officers of the Formations to which he was Postal Officer and adviser. Major E W Shepherd, who was responsible for organisation of the mail and postal traffic arrangements for the invasion, brought a coolly analytical mind to the job. He also provided a perfect foil to his superior officers the flames of whose occasional wilder flights of fancy, and of enthusiasm, he would either fan, or damp down and extinguish with his calm and incisive logic. (He was to become after the war Senior Director in the Post Office Telecommunications business). Then again there was "Freddie" Ash, cool, urbane, softly spoken, and

ever immaculately dressed. Arriving relatively late on the 21 Army Group scene (on posting from Italy) he quickly made his mark and earned a reputation for his self-effacing but nonetheless efficient direction of affairs along the L of C. Newell, Gammon, Driver - directing affairs at Corps level - Hyde commanding the Base - Smart, Hughes, Latham - the list runs on and on. They came from almost every grade in the Post Office. The army provided them with the opportunity to show what stuff they were made of. They were quick to seize the chance and to demonstrate their ability to get results - which is really what matters.

Looking back again over those exacting years, there must be one outstanding feature which will remain in the memory of those Postal Officers who were most directly caught up in the preparations for OVERLORD and in the execution of those preparations. It was the remarkable change in attitude of the "powers that be" towards the Army Postal Services which took place as the months and then the years went by.

In the early days after Dunkirk, and even into the 1942/43 era, many staff Officers, and quite a number of Regimental Officers - not to mention their men - had comparatively little time for the Army Postal Services organisation in the UK. Some regarded it as an unnecessary adjunct of the military machine. In a sense this was perhaps not so surprising as might be imagined. After all there was an excellent postal service provided by the GPO. It provided rapid transit for letters and parcels from and to every part of the United Kingdom. It could carry the Forces mail within the UK almost without so much as a hiccup. Why then the need for a postal service run by the Army? Why the need for Army Postal Units running a service in parallel with that of the GPO? The answers to questions like these were perfectly valid but, at times, they seemed to lack that conviction which could only finally be provided when the Army Postal Service was operating overseas and was the sole provider of service.

Divisional Postal Officers - known almost universally as "Posties" - were the focal points for this questioning. Many found themselves at first in an invidious situation. Their requests to be kept fully in the picture on operational plans, and on such matters as the movement of units and formations, were inclined to meet with a frosty response and had to be pushed hard to secure a response even if there was one. The need to preserve security was quoted as a reason for withholding location information from the Postal Officers. Reports made on Exercise BUMPER bear testimony to the truth of this statement. Often something had to go wrong with the service before the postal organisation could get to know what it wanted and needed to know. The discerning Postal Officer was quick to realise that to get results he must establish himself firmly in the eyes of the 'G' and 'Q' Staffs and that there were more ways than one in which this might be done. Not a few had little to do with Posts or with Postal affairs. One Postal Officer with a Division in the south of England had, in his private life,

acquired no mean equestrian skill and, since he shared his liking for these skills with the Divisional Commander it was not long before he could ask and obtain without question any information or resources which he needed for the discharge of his postal responsibilities. Again, there were not a few Postal Officers with Divisions who were quick to seize on the almost inevitable invitation to take on the Presidency of the Mess in which they found themselves. Their ability to manage and keep the Mess Accounts in order was highly prized by their brother Officers. The ability of men drawn from the administrative side of the Post Office to analyse and report on events or facts also came in useful so far as the Postal Officer with one Division was concerned. After an exercise in the south-east he busied himself analysing and preparing a report on some aspects of the administrative performance of the Division while it was on exercise with a summary of the lessons which he thought might be learned. So highly was the report regarded that it was brought by one of the senior Staff Officers of the Division to the notice of the Divisional Commander. After that the Postal Officer concerned had no trouble at all in getting from the 'G' and 'Q' staff whatever information or assistance he might need to run the Division's postal service.

Thus, in one way or another, the Postal Officers with Formations who were to take part in Operation OVERLORD won respect and established themselves in the eyes of the Staff. By the end of 1942 most of them had achieved such standing with their Staffs as ensured their ability to get almost anything for which they asked. And, as Formations were involved in exercise after exercise, it was increasingly borne in on the Staff that the Army Postal Service was the only organisation which could provide a more or less continuous postal service in a war of movement and that, good as the GPO was, the provision of service in such conditions was quite beyond its capability.

But it was far from being only the Officers who were quick to establish themselves in the eyes of their colleagues. The postal NCOs and the Sappers too were equally quick to do so. They came of a good stock and the fact that they were Post Office trained and were generally eminently adaptable counted for a great deal. Their calibre can be judged from the fact that when, in early 1944, a suggestion was made that non-postal units in the army should be asked to release men with Post Office experience to strengthen the Home Postal Centre, the units were most reluctant to let such men go. Generally the men regarded as well above average intelligence - many of them had secured promotion to NCO, or were employed on clerical work in Orderly Rooms, or had otherwise made themselves virtually indispensable. The suggested "comb-out" was not at all welcome and it never got off the ground.

All this time, while Postal Officers at the lower levels were seeking to secure for the Army Postal Service the recognition which was its due, attitudes at higher levels were proving slow to change. Here again

it is easy for the historian to criticise, but not so easy for him or the reader to visualise the circumstances which produced a climate in which the Forces' need for an efficient postal service was regarded as of relatively low priority. After all the nation was fighting for its very existence. Everykind of transport was in short supply. The invasion of Europe was still a long way off. And it became clearer every day that if the invasion could be mounted at all it would be supremely difficult to ensure its success. Shipping space would be at a premium. Men, ammunition, food, medical supplies, would have to have absolute priority and, so far as the planners could see, there would, at least in the early days, be little or no shipping space available for postal personnel still less for mails. This particular line of thought found expression at a series of meetings which took place during the second half of 1942 and at which possible plans for postal services during the early days of an invasion of the Continent were considered. The War Office, RAF, and admiralty were all represented at these meetings, as were also the UK, Canadian, and US Army Postal Services. The general line of thought seemed to be that shipment of mail to the troops on the far shore during the early days of an assault on the Continent was unlikely to be feasible until "a fortnight" after the assault had gone in. Postal Units were not to be shipped to the far shore with the Formations they were there to serve, but only when circumstances permitted or required them to be there. As regards mail from the troops on the far shore it was felt that "no organised mail services from the (troops on the far shore) would be possible until a port was established overseas".

It is interesting to imagine the storm which would have arisen had postal services for the invasion forces been provided on this basis. Fortunately, however, attitudes began to show signs of change. Thus, in the C in C, Home Forces, comments on Exercise SPARTAN in March 1943 we find the following:

"It is most important that mails should reach the troops as expeditiously as possible"

The comments went on to suggest ways and means by which this objective might be achieved. In particular the need for independent transport for mails was emphasised.

The change in attitude was given altogether fresh emphasis with the appointment of Colonels Roberts, Drew and Smith to key positions in the APS hierarchy. Indeed the contrast is sharpened by a brief reference to events surrounding the second of these appointments. Second Army Headquarters was formed at Cowley Barracks, Oxford, on the 5th May 1943. A Postal Branch was included in the establishment of the Headquarters but it comprised 1 L/Cpl. and 1 Sapper with no Officer post. Not until just over two months later, and then only after the strongest

representations had been made to the 'G' Staffs from several quarters, was authority given to add an Officer - an Assistant Director of Army Postal Services to the Army Headquarters establishment. This sequence of events is illustrative of a situation which was not uncommon, viz, the lack of appreciation of the size of the problem facing the postal planning staffs and, in some instances, a total failure to realise that there was a need to do such planning. Not for the first time in history there was an attitude in some quarters that "anyone can run a postal service". But with the arrival of the new Postal Officer at HQ Second Army things began to change and, by the following February, not only was there a fully staffed Postal Branch at the Headquarters but it had been moved from the Rear Headquarters to the Advanced Headquarters where the operational planning was being done. The Postal Branch at HQ Second Army "had arrived" and found its rightful place.

Col Roberts was never one for mincing his words and from the moment of his appointment as the senior Postal Officer in 21 Army Group he began to voice in no uncertain terms his views on the priority which should be given to mail as a key factor in the maintenance of 'the fighting man's morale'. He was supported in this quite unequivocally by Lt.Cols. Drew and Smith in their respective spheres. And the pressure which they exerted at Army Group and Army level were being matched meanwhile by similar pressures at Corps level. Thus in June 1943 we find the Postal Officer 8 Corps - Major Cashin - reporting to his Staff as follows:

"However well trained, an army cannot give of its best if Officers and men are avoidably pre-occupied with anxiety as to the well-being of their families they will not expect the postal organisation to 'drift' into a new sphere of operations with apparent indifference to their welfare. Moreover, it is similarly desirable that the morale of their people at home - many of whom are engaged in essential war work - should be maintained at a high levelthe real value of Postal Units cannot be measured in terms of the relatively small shipping space involved..... it is essential for Corps and Divisional Postal Units to accompany their Formations on completion of the assault stage..... the strongest possible pressure should be exerted at the highest level to ensure that the Army Postal Service becomes effective with the least possible delay".

Only a month later we find Lt.Col. Drew reporting on the postal arrangements made for Exercise JANTZEN - an exercise designed to test the arrangements for concentrating, marshalling, and embarking the invasion forces and also for landing on the far shore. He urged that whereas delivery of mail in the marshalling areas had not so far been so much as contemplated, the practicability of giving the troops their mail "at the latest moment before departure" should be explored. Furthermore, that whereas planning had so far been on the basis that mail would

not be landed on the invasion beaches until D +5 the possibility of delivering and despatching at an earlier stage after D Day should be explored.

The tide of opinion in favour of the earliest possible start with postal services once the invasion began had now begun to set. It was soon to receive such an impulse from an unexpected quarter as to cause it to set irreversibly. It had not up to this point been even so much as visualised that a Commander-in-Chief, not to mention one of the calibre of General Montgomery, would concern himself personally with the arrangements to be made for providing postal services for the invading forces. But at the beginning of 1944 Col. Roberts was summoned to see the C-in-C, and his MGA (Major General in charge of Administration). It was made abundantly clear to the Colonel that the C-in-C regarded the morale of the troops as the key factor affecting their fighting efficiency and that a "quick and regular" mail service was the biggest single factor contributing to the maintenance of high morale. To that end the C-in-C's intention was to have mail flown into and out of the beachhead as soon as airstrips became available on the far shore. Not only that but the mail (and newspapers) was to be carried "by means of airplanes definitely allotted to the Army Postal Service". From that point on there was no further argument: it was accepted generally that as soon as an airlift could be arranged it would be established and used exclusively for carriage of mail both into and out of the theatre.

So far so good. It was clear however that an airlift would not be possible until airstrips had been seized or constructed in the beachhead and that might not be for some weeks after D-Day. There remained the question of the surface carriage of mail in the intervening period after D Day. Up to about the middle of April 1944 the War Office remained opposed to the idea of starting the postal service with the far shore prior to D +5. They said they were doubtful about the feasibility of arranging "a speedy regular service for the period D +1 to D +4". But by this time the pressure from 21 Army Group for the earliest possible start with the postal service was overwhelming and the point was finally conceded. From then on there followed decision after decision - that men of the Army Postal Service should be flown in with the airborne army before H hour; that postal personnel should go in with the commando units and with the Beach Groups; and so on. The over-riding aim was to get the postal service going as quickly as possible, and this on the grounds that the sooner it could be started the more marked would be the effect on morale. Similarly, mail deliveries were to be continued to the troops in the marshalling areas up to the latest possible time before embarkation and, if sailing was delayed, even after embarkation. News from home was what the C-in-C thought the troops should have and it was what they wanted. The Army Postal Services set out to see that they would get it.

What these decisions meant for the men who had to carry them out, and how they themselves felt the impact of the change in attitudes towards mail priorities is perhaps best illustrated by an account of the personal experience of the Officer who commanded the 6th Airborne Divisional Postal Unit (Capt. J C G Hine). It is here given in his own words:-

"I joined the 6th Airborne Division in the capacity of Postal Officer and Commanding Officer of the Division's Postal Unit in 1942. At first there were very few members of the Divisional Staff prepared even to entertain the idea of the Division's "postmen" taking part in the actual airborne assault on the Continent. But by about the beginning of 1944 it was accepted that elements of the Postal Unit should go in with the Division's airborne assault forces prior to H-hour.

We began to train. First in gliders. More often than not we made up "live" loads for the trainees of the Glider Pilot Regiment. This experience was not without its trials. The first gliders used for training purposes were relatively small. As often as not at least one of "the load" would be air-sick. The later gliders were bigger and much steadier. Nor was the training without its alarming side. It was, for example, far from reassuring to find one's pilot of the day a gentleman who, when last seen the night before, was resisting all attempts to get him out of the local hostelry at closing time. But those were the days of youthful exuberance. My own chaps were full of enthusiasm and wanted to be in the swim and to show what they could do given the chance. Two of them eventually became glider pilots. Others went on a parachute jumping course at Ringway and came back "on top of the world". So, the training and the preparations went on until finally the time arrived for "briefing". O's C Units were briefed individually. When my turn came I was summoned to see the A.A. & Q.M.G. He asked me whether we could maintain postal deliveries after the Marshalling Camps were sealed and right up to D -1. And could we then "set up shop" again on the far side on D Day or at the latest on D +1. The first requirement presented no special difficulties and I said I thought we could carry it out successfully - as we did in the event. The second requirement should be practicable too if we were going in with the airborne assault troops.

In the event we were given half a dozen "places" - three in the gliders and three with the parachutists. A "follow-up" of 12 men was to come in by sea on D +1 or D +2.

In the days following briefing there was a noticeable tension in the air in the sealed camps. I sat talking one evening with a close friend of mine. He told me what he had to do on OVERLORD. He would be going over in a glider with a bull-dozer. He had the job of uprooting the obstacles the Germans had been busy erecting in the fields in which gliders might land. He would be setting out at 2200 hrs. on D -1 and

he had to finish his task before the main glider force was due to arrive. He told me his wife had just had a child and he hoped he'd somehow come through. He hoped letters would get through alright. For the first time I began to think about the hazards involved for all of us. My friend seemed suddenly to become a lonely figure and there was little I could do to help him. But suddenly the importance of the mail for men like him became more sharply fixed in my mind.

Compared with him I was fortunate. The requirements of the mail service kept me fully occupied and I had precious little time to think about what might lie ahead.

It didn't seem long before we were on the way to the airfield. I was in the back of a lorry looking out over the tailboard. Amongst the many people who were lining the roads to watch us go through there was a little old lady who looked as though she were well into her 70s. She took one look at me and called out "Cheer up, son; it mayn't be so bad; and it'll soon be over." I didn't quite know which way to take the latter part of the remark; but I'm sure it was well meant.

We took our seats in the glider. There was a minimum of fuss and I thought how routine it all seemed. Then we were off and with nothing to do for the time being my imagination began to run riot. After a time I thought to myself I wonder where we are now? We must be well out over the sea. I couldn't swim a stroke and I kept going over my lifebelt to make sure it was properly adjusted. I wondered how long it would be before we made land - and what sort of a reception we'd get when we made it. The sea-sick pills I had been given stopped me from feeling sick; but they gave me pains in the stomach. I worked out that we'd be in the air for something like three hours. That was a long time, and it started me thinking about our being attacked from the air. I recalled that gliders are sitting targets. Then I remembered we'd been told that there would be complete air protection. As the time wore on I began to think about the landing. I hoped and prayed it would be a soft one. And I began to wonder whether my friend had done his stuff with his bull-dozer and the "obstacles". Had I known it he was already dead - killed just after he'd cleared his allocated zone. All this time I kept telling myself that the last thing I must do was to let anyone else see that I was in any way scared.

Suddenly someone shouted that we were over the coast. I felt cold. A few more minutes and I felt the tow rope go and then we were down to a rough landing. The glider was groaning, cracking, and splitting open. Someone was shouting "out". There seemed to be a hell of a noise going on. I grabbed for my tin hat and marvelled at the sudden sense of security which it seemed to give me. Then I was out. Nearby a glider went up in flames. Another straddled a wall. It seemed as though all hell was let loose. I thought if I ever get out of this I'll be lucky. I wondered how "jumper" lads had fared (Subsequently I found to my

dismay that one had been wounded in the leg and thigh and another in the backside). I'd no idea where we were but subsequently discovered we'd come down west of Ranville and close to one of the bridges over the River Orne which had been seized earlier on by men of the Division who'd crash landed in gliders right on target. The chances of ever getting a postal service started seemed to me at the time to be about as good as the chance of winning the pools.

Then, all at once, the organisation began to take over. Someone was shepherding us off the landing zone. I remembered I'd somehow got to make my way to Div HQ wherever that might be. I saw a Military Policeman and asked him if he knew where Div HQ was. "Up there", he said, pointing to a lane. I set out and after walking what seemed to be about half a mile came to a house which - wonder of wonders - turned out to be Div HQ. And who should be standing there but the DAQMG. He wanted to know what sort of a trip I'd had and which way I'd approached Div. HQ. He said "You're lucky to have made it old man: the snipers are busy along that road and they've already got seven or eight chaps". He added that there was a lot of enemy activity between the Div area and the coast and that it was out of the question for the time being to think of getting back to the beaches to collect or dispose of mail as had been planned.

A short time afterwards one of my Corporals turned up. He'd left the UK with a stock of stamps and other postal equipment but had become parted from it in the shock of landing. Having reported in he went back to the landing zone and after a search lasting some time returned with the missing items intact.

Soon others of my lads reported in and we "set up shop" in a barn in the Div area. Conditions were pretty primitive and we spent a lot of time in slit trenches. But from D +1 on the unit post orderlies called daily and we despatched outgoing mail regularly from that date. How we got back to the beaches to make the despatches is another story. But we did and I have personal proof that the mails we despatched got home, for on D +4 my mother (a widow) received a kilo of Ranville butter wrapped in cabbage leaves in my emergency ration tin.

Things were not so good in the reverse direction for reasons which are no doubt dealt with elsewhere and which were no fault of ours. Although we got back to the beaches to collect mail on D +1 there was simply no mail there to be collected: it was lying on ships out in the anchorages as we later learned. At the time it seemed an age before the first mail from the UK trickled through to us. In practice it was not so very long considering all the difficulties of the operation. And once the flow got started the service rapidly settled down and there was little or no complaint about it. Once the airlift started the post from the UK got to us with remarkable speed and there was general satisfaction with the service.

Few Officers of the Army Postal Services can have had the privilege of commanding such a fine lot of lads as made up my unit. Closest to me of course were the two Sergeants - Wilshaw and Moles- and their names I shall never forget. But I will not forget the rest of the lads either for they were all as ingenious, hardworking and loyal as a man could possibly wish. I suppose an operation like ours has never before been attempted: and it may never be attempted again. But I for one would not have missed the experience for worlds and I am sure every one of my lads who went in by parachute or glider on Operation OVERLORD would say the same."

Because it is essentially a matter of life and death, war is a serious business, especially for the participants. But it has its lighter side too. Without that it might perhaps be unendurable for some. Often the humour is intermingled with the pathos and when this happens it can serve to relieve the tension or put a different complexion on circumstances which would otherwise be oppressive. The foibles and weaknesses of senior officers are always regarded as fair game for humorists of all ranks. There is nothing wrong in this for, after all, it is the foibles which make the characters and an army with a healthy spirit rejoices in its "characters" and, in a peculiar kind of way, puts them on a pedestal. Two brief reminiscences may serve to illustrate the point.

The first comes from the pen of a young Officer who was with "the Colonel" (Lt. Col. C R Smith) when, together, they embarked for Normandy. He writes thus:

"From time to time during the day we had stood upon the hills overlooking Portsmouth and watched the long lines of ships beginning to pull out towards the open sea. It was the eve of D Day. And now it was our turn. In the late afternoon we set out for the "hard" where we were to embark. Travelling in convoy it was some hours before we reached it and long past midnight before our turn to go aboard came. The quayside was a seething mass of activity with vehicles jammed nose to tail and here and there in the subdued light from shielded storm lamps it was possible to discern figures shouting orders. At last we reached the head of the ramp which led down to the foot of the tailboard of the L.S.T. on which we were to embark. Between the ramp and the tail board was a gap of about 8 - 10 feet in which water glistened. I estimated it to be about 3 - 4 feet deep at the point where the ramp and the tailboard of the L.S.T. met. The Colonel was in his Staff car which two or three days before had been waterproofed by the driver so that it could pass through 3 - 4 feet of water without affecting the running of the engine. At that moment my mind went back to a short and pity instruction which the Colonel had issued to all his Postal Officers a short time before on the subject of waterproofing. I quote:

"This is a most important item from the postal point of view in view of the very restricted number of postal vehicles which will

be ashore in the early days. Postal Officers must understand that it is their personal responsibility to see their vehicles get ashore and any Postal Officer whose unit has a "drowned" vehicle will be regarded by me as personally responsible."

The scene was set. The water glistened darkly and evilly at the foot of the ramp as though it were waiting for a victim. The driver went cautiously down the slope, through the water, and up the steep ramp of the L.S.T. Just as the front wheels reached the top of the ramp, an American sailor jumped from nowhere in front of the car, arms outspread, and shouting at the top of his voice. The disconcerted driver missed his brake, and before he could stop it, the car rolled backwards down the ramp to hit the water at a rate of knots. The result was terrible to behold. The engine of the car spluttered and died away. And after a slight oscillatory motion the car came to rest in the deepest part of the water. There followed a torrent of expletives such as the good citizens of Portsmouth had never before heard and would never hear again. After which the Colonel subsided, while those of us who were with him strove hard to keep our faces straight. Fortunately the military machine was ready for this sort of thing. A very few minutes and the car was being hauled out of the water and up the tail-board of the L.S.T. and into the hold. During the crossing the engine was dried out and when we reached the Normandy shore the car went straight ashore without even pausing in its stride. It had had its moment. And of one thing we were certain. There would be no further reference of any kind to a certain instruction about waterproofing no matter how many postal vehicles might stagger as they strove to go through several feet of water."

The second incident in which one of the senior officers was involved provides an illustration of the truth of that saying which is well known to all junior ranks namely that 'to give an order is one thing; to carry it out is another. The difficulties which were experienced in the early days in getting mail ashore from ships lying in the anchorages off the beach-head have been described at some length in an earlier chapter. The reader will recall that these difficulties were due in the main to the inability to locate the ships which were carrying mail from amongst the hundreds lying off-shore. In an attempt to solve the problem of identification arrangements were made for an Officer of the Army Postal Services to patrol the anchorages in an amphibious jeep. The idea was sound: its execution presented problems. After an early failure to get results the Officer concerned reported back up to the chain of command on the problems he had encountered. In answer he received a peremptory reply from the Colonel "to stop arguing and get results". On explaining that, while his record would show that he could usually achieve the impossible but that miracles took a little longer, he received an even more peremptory reply to the effect that if he could not do the job himself the Colonel would show him how to do it. So, records the young Officer:

"I readily accepted the challenge. The weather was foul but I arranged to have a launch with driver ready for the Colonel's arrival. We were advised that a convoy was just coming in to the anchorage and with the Colonel looking very purposeful we set out to meet it. The Colonel stood on one side of the launch and I stood on the other. As we approached each ship we shouted "Are you carrying mail?" Back came the answer "No". We got the same response from every ship which we hailed - and there were dozens of them. Meanwhile the launch was bucking and tossing in a manner which tended to distract one more and more from the purpose of the mission. After some hours of this I was feeling desperately ill and surreptitious glances showed me that the Colonel was not feeling one hundred per cent. My one hope now was that he would give up the ghost before I did. He did in one sense for he said "We're going back. It's b..... well impossible". So we turned about and began to make the long run back to the beach. The bucketing was now worse than ever and it was just my luck that I should have to turn the final shade of green and fill the driver's tin hat while the Colonel managed to make it without loss of dignity. Crestfallen though I was I felt nonetheless that the experience had been worthwhile. It had let the Colonel see at first hand the difficulties with which I was faced. And while in the days which followed, when conditions at sea were not so bad, we had greater success in locating ships carrying mail my experience with the Colonel showed him that something more was needed - in other words an improvement in the system used for locating ships carrying mail. The answer lay partly in improved methods of signalling along the Movements chain of communications and partly in arranging for the coasters carrying mail to fly the international mail pennant. As for my relations with the Colonel I can only say that he had gone up in my estimation. Not because I had been proved right in my report on the difficulties. But rather because he had been to see for himself what the difficulties were and had thus acquired first hand knowledge of what was needed to put matters to right. Perhaps a little more of this sort of thing would help today in the troubled area of industrial relationships".

War as we read of it in history books is, in many respects, altogether different from war as it happens on the ground. What is equally true is that war on the ground presents a different appearance when viewed from different levels and segments of the military machine. To the Generals and senior Staff Officers whose job it is to direct operations it so often appears to be a matter of lines drawn on maps, lines which change from hour to hour as "the front" moves at varying speeds in one direction or another following the tide of battle. The front line soldier on the other hand has an altogether different view of the war. Crouched in a foxhole, or moving cautiously along a road or across a field, his view is limited to a segment of no more than a relatively few yards. He is unlikely to have much idea of the directions in which the front line extends on either side of him, even if he knows exactly

where the front line is at any particular moment. His main concern is probably that of survival. To him the battle proceeds generally in pockets of action which may be prolonged or be separated by long periods of inaction. In between the periods of action, and the tenseness of combat, his thoughts are likely more often than not to turn to his people back home. And his anxiety will generally be for news of them and secondly to let them know how he is faring.

The soldier who forms part of the army's supply machine on the other hand may well have the same anxiety for news from home. But his view of the battle is wholly different from that of the General and from that of the front line soldier. Except in a very broad sense he may not have a view of the battle at all. He has a job to do. It may not be greatly dissimilar from the job he does in civvy street but it has to be done under different conditions and with a much greater sense of urgency. His main concern is to get on with the job in hand. The relationship between that job and the conduct of the battle is something with which he may not feel greatly concerned if at all. He may not give a thought to the contribution which his particular activity makes to the battle. If he gives it a thought he may conclude that the job he is doing is of little consequence. In fact, along with the micro-cosmic activities of a thousand others it is of vital consequence. This is particularly the case with the army's postal service. There are two reasons why this should be so. In the first place there is one characteristic of the postal service which sets it apart from all the other supply services of the military machine. A round of ammunition is good for any gun which fires rounds of that calibre. A tin of bully is good for any stomach which is in need of it. But a letter is of value for only one individual - if it does not reach the man to whom it is addressed it might as well never have been written. It must be steered to one individual amongst a million others and the process which alone can steer it to that individual depends not upon mass effort but on the efforts of a series of individuals along the postal chain which connects the sender of the letter with the addressee. If one of those individuals fails to do his job properly the letter may fail in its purpose. And each of the individuals must do his job at the right time. He cannot leave it until a later hour or a later day still less a later week. For letters cannot be stockpiled and drawn upon when the demand arises. The mail must be kept moving - always towards the addressees. And the men who served in Operation OVERLORD with the Postal Section of the Royal Engineers - the Army Postal Services - were well aware that somewhere, whether it was in the Rear Maintenance Area, or in the Regiment of Artillery, or in a Medical Unit, or in a supply column, or in a foxhole, or wherever, there was an individual who in common with thousands of others waited - for a letter from home. They were aware that only the receipt of that letter would remove some of the anxiety which the addressee might be feeling, or produce the uplift of spirit which only a letter from home can do. They were equally well aware that anxieties felt by people back at home could only be

relieved by the prompt receipt of letters from the soldier abroad. In those crucial weeks after the assault on the Continent had gone in there was in fact an unusually acute two-way anxiety - that felt by families at home for the safety of their soldier in France being equalled by the soldier's anxiety for the safety of his family under German air and V weapon attacks.

In that very readable book "The Battle for Normandy" General Essame points out that at times there must exist a gulf between those directing a battle and those fighting it. And that when a battle is in progress the narrow confines of his part of the line dominate the mind of the ordinary fighting man. General Essame goes on to quote from the diary of a young officer who was involved in the battles around Caen prior to the break-out. It is the evening of the 8th July 1944:

"I still had to find my bearings. This involved a good deal of running about. I saw quite a few sights - men torn in half, guts lying around, arms and feet, bodies lacerated in one form or another.....There was a smell of blood.

We got the guns and began to dig. Mercifully there was half an hour's break in the shelling. The shelling started. I have never known anything like it. My batman and I had managed to scrape a little hole in the bank. We crouched in that. I had put the machine guns forward of the line of the wood on the opposite side of the wall. The stuff landed all around and I had one which landed just off the lip of my own hole. There was a wave of hot air, one's whole body was jerked and showers of earth fell in on usThey kept it up all day.

A parcel came up in the evening. I thought this was a pretty good effort."

General Essame adds his own comments. He says:

"The arrival of the post was one of the highlights in any fighting soldier's day."

Anyone who has seen troops on active service will know that if the soldier receives food and mail together, he will always read his letter before he turns to his food.

From the moment when planning began in earnest it was the aim and function of the Officers and men of the Postal Section of the Royal Engineers throughout 21 Army Group to provide the 'highlight in the fighting soldier's day' to which General Essame has referred. It was thus their aim and function to provide the best possible postal service of which they were capable: and to do so no matter what the difficulties. Some of those difficulties were quite unprecedented just as the OVERLORD operation itself was unprecedented. There were setbacks and disappointments - just as there were for other Services in the Allied armies.

But throughout the whole campaign there was only one occasion on which really serious criticism was levelled against the postal services. That was when there was serious - and at the time inexplicable - delay to homegoing mail soon after D Day. Even on that occasion the fault was not that of the Army Postal Services: it lay with the dislocation of life and services in London caused by the flying bomb attacks on the capital. Apart from this one occasion no serious public or military criticism had developed. Indeed veiled compliments on the quality of the service had even appeared in the British Press.

How strikingly all this contrasts with the broadcast made by the German authorities on the 25th September 1941 to the effect that their public and soldiers should not expect to get letters from the front and from home respectively. The reasons given were that the German Army could not afford transport to carry mails; that roads were being destroyed by the Russians; and that traffic on such roads as there were made passage for mails very difficult. No mention here of air transport for mails. The contrast in priorities is striking. In the German Army mails clearly got low priority when it came to the allocation of resources. The effect on morale can easily be imagined. In OVERLORD on the other hand the C-in-C himself regarded the mails service as warranting top priority, rating an efficient service as making the number one contribution to the fighting soldier's morale.

As the Allied armies stood poised for their final thrust into Germany, the British soldier in the B.L.A. had come to regard receipt of letters from home within two to three days of posting as commonplace. In that fact lay the clearest testimony to the work of the Officers and men of the Postal Section of the Royal Engineers who planned and executed the postal arrangements for Operation OVERLORD. Working for long hours, often under exceptionally heavy pressure and not infrequently under trying conditions, never once blessed with a sufficiency of numbers, most of their work had been done "behind scenes". But it was done nevertheless efficiently and well.

In this history it has not been possible to refer to the individual achievements of any more than a handful of people. But the service could never have been what it was without the selfless application of countless others whose work and achievements must inevitably go almost unmentioned. What better way could there be in which to conclude this history than in the words with which Col. Roberts ended a 'report on achievements to date' which he made to the War Office at the end of 1944:-

"And there are also many other things which were done, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books which should be written"

- St John Ch. 21, v25."

THE END

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- F - Diagram showing how mails were despatched from Nottingham to the various Army Railheads during the "APO England" address period.
- G - Notes on the organisation of the beaches across which the assault on the Continent took place
- H1 - Diagram showing the planned positioning of the Army Post Offices ("S" Offices") in relation to the Beach Maintenance Areas; and a second diagram showing the actual positioning on the ground in the beach-head
- H2 - Statement showing dates of opening and closing, with locations, of "S" Offices, and Base APOs, in operation between 6th June and 31st December 1944
- J - Statement showing details of UK Residues, locations, and Railheads

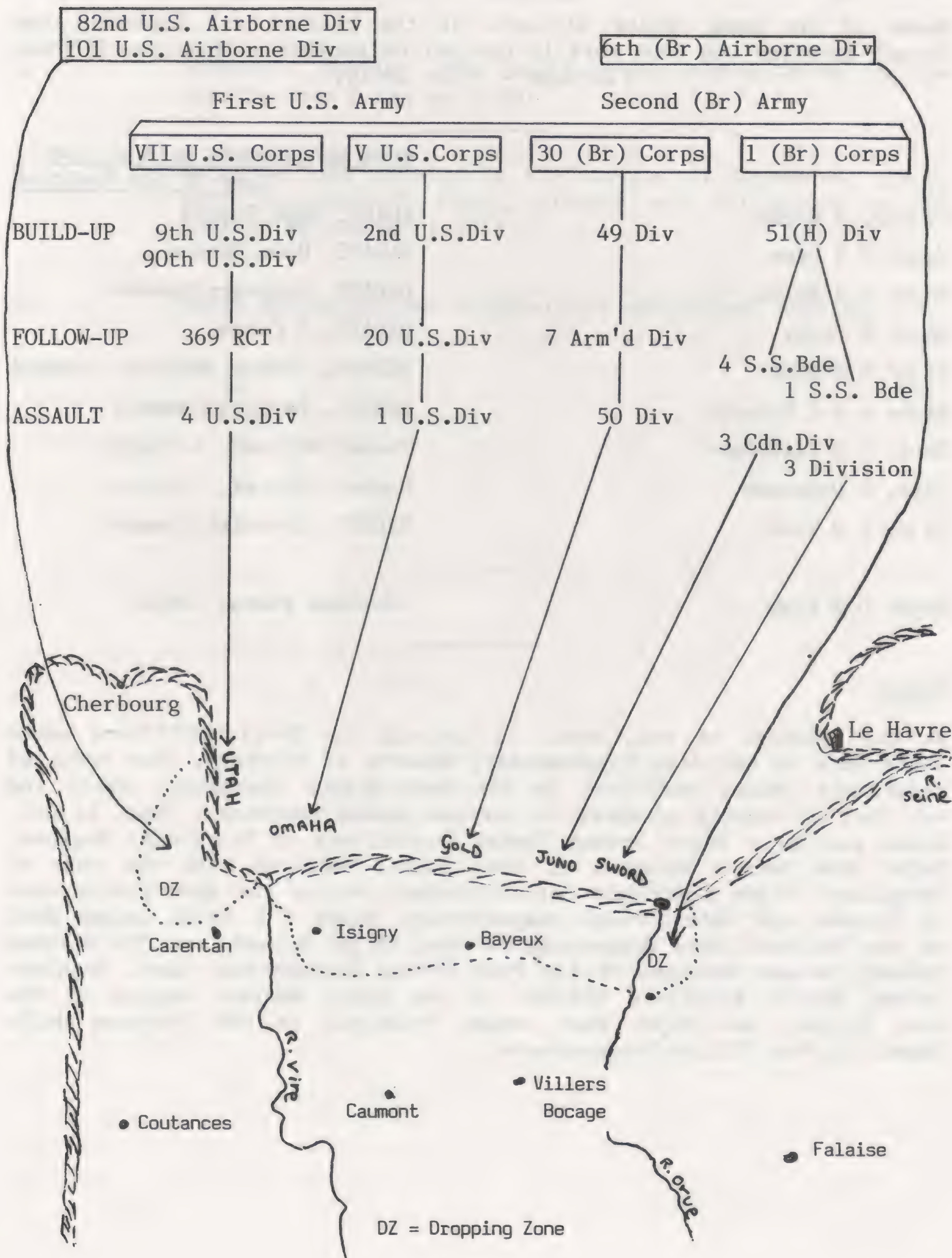
- K - Schedule of postage rates applicable as from arrival of the invasion forces in Normandy
- L - Statement showing this build-up of Postal Units in the theatre from D Day to D +90
- M - Notes on the revision of the sorting arrangements, plans, and "bagging-off" lists, planned and introduced in the last three months of 1944
- N - Notes on the systems of Numerical and Decimal Sorting

Names of the more senior Officers of the British and Canadian Army Postal Services who took part in one way or another in Exercise BUMPER. (29 Sept - 3 Oct 1941).

	<u>Army appointment held at the time of the Exercise</u>
Lt.Col. J Evans	ADAPS, Home Forces
Major J N Drew	DADAPS, Home Forces
Major S H Bates	DADAPS, Southern Command
Major E Caddy	DADAPS, 5 Corps
Major C R Smith	DADAPS, South Eastern Command
Major A W C Ryland	DADAPS, Eastern Command
Capt. P E Pritchard	Postal Officer, 11 Corps
Capt. G Dennison	Postal Officer, 2 Corps
Major E W Wood	DADAPS, Scottish Command
Major G W Ross	Canadian Postal Corps

Notes

At the outbreak of war, most, if not all the British Officers named above were on the Army Supplementary Reserve of Officers. They occupied relatively junior positions in the Post Office hierarchy. After the war they ultimately advanced to various senior positions. Thus, Lt.Col. Evans and Major Bates became Postal Controllers of Provincial Regions. Major Drew became Director of Army Postal Services with the rank of Brigadier. Major Caddy and Capt Pritchard became the Head Postmasters of Croydon and Peterborough respectively. Major C R Smith became Head of the National Data Processing Service. Major Ryland (now Sir William Ryland) became Chairman of the Post Office Corporation. Capt. Dennison became Public Relations Officer of the North Western Region of the Post Office, and Major Wood became Principal in the Overseas Mails Branch at Post Office Headquarters.



Notes on Appendix B

ASSAULT formations - landed first and were charged to secure a Divisional covering position large enough to clear the beach of observed artillery fire and to provide room for the concentration of the

FOLLOW-UP formations, which landed on their heels, and sought to push out the beachhead providing space for the concentration of the following

BUILD-UP formations.

There was a fundamental planning difference between Assault (and follow-up) formations on the one hand and Build-up formations on the other. All the craft and ships necessary to lift the former were assembled before the invasion started and the cross-channel movement of those formations was planned right down to the detailed allotment of every man and vehicle to a specific ship or craft. The Build-Up formations on the other hand were dependent for their transportation on the amount of shipping returning from the far shore. Their planning finished, therefore, at the production of a priority list showing the order in which units or sections of units were to arrive on the far shore. The allocation of men and vehicles to individual ships was done by Movement Control as the shipping became available. There was therefore a degree of elasticity in the movement of Build-Up formations on this side of the water which was absent from the movement of the Assault and Follow-Up formations. This in turn had its effect on the machinery set up on this side of the water for the provision of postal services during the operation launching period.

Principal Officers of the Royal Engineers (Postal Section) and allied Services involved in the postal planning and preparations for Operation OVERLORD

War Office

Brig V R Kenny - DAPS - and later - Brig F Lane
Col A J McCarraher - DDAPS

Home Forces

Lt-Col S H Bates - ADAPS
Major E Caddy - DADAPS

HQ 21 Army Group

Col W R Roberts
Lt.Col. J N Drew
Major E W Shepherd

Home Postal Depot

Col D Ross - C.O.
Lt.Col E T Vallance - 2 I/C

HQ Second Army

Lt.Col. C R Smith

Home Commands

Eastern - Maj. G R Clegg
Southern - Maj. R R Rutherford
 Major J R Shearer
 (wef Apr '44)
South Eastern -

Corps Postal Officers

1 Corps - Major Newell
8 Corps - Major Cashin
12 Corps - Major Gammon
30 Corps - Major Driver

8 Base Army Post Office

Major W J Hyde - C.O.

No 1 A.P.D.C.

Major J W Aedy - C.O.

First Cdn Army

Lt.Col. G W Ross -
ADPS

2nd Tactical Air Force

W/Cdr W J Shewry

Admiralty

F S Back Esq - Commns
Sec

U S Army Postal Service

Col A C Hahn
Lt.Col. E E Schroeder

The General Post Office

J E Yates Esq CB

G A Moss Esq

Introduction of the closed postal address "A.P.O. England" showing
dates on which the address was adopted by each formation etc.

Following are the dates on which formations and units of 21 Army Group adopted the address ".A.P.O. England":-

11 April 1944	-	12 and 30 Corps complete
14 April 1944	-	1 and 8 Corps complete
21 April 1944	-	HQ Airborne Troops
	-	1st and 6th Airborne Divisions complete
	-	S.A.S. Troops (including HQ French Demi Brigade; 1 Belgian Para Coy; 3 French Para Battn; 4 Fr. Para Battn; 20 French Liaison; and "F" Sqdn GHQ Liaison Regt)
	-	79 Armoured Division
1 May 1944	-	HQ Second Army
	-	Second Army Troops
	-	S.S. Brigades
	-	A.A. Brigades
	-	A.G.R.As
	-	11 L of C Area and all Sub Areas under command Second Army
	-	ALL BRITISH formations and units under command First Canadian Army
17 May 1944	-	83 Group RAF
1 June 1944	-	84 Group RAF

Staffs of static Camps in the Marshalling Areas and the Embarkation Areas adopted the "A.P.O. England" address on the 17th April 1944

Formations and units which were not part of 21 Army Group but which adopted the "A.P.O. England" address prior to D Day as part of the deception plan were as follows, with the date on which the address came into use:

21 April 1944	-	HQ Special Service Group
24 April 1944	-	52 Infantry Division complete

Appendix D (cont)

- Norwegian Contingent (including Brit. Liaison Headquarters liaising with that Contingent)
- 113 Infantry Brigade
- HQ 2 Corps (Advance)
- 33 Cipher Section and A and B Sections No 2 Coy, 2 Corps Signals
- 24 April 1944
 - A and B Troops No 1 Sqdn, 9 Arm'd Div Signals
 - HQ.RASC War Office Troop Carrying Column
 - 789 Command Mixed Transport Company
- 1 May 1944 -
 - 55 Infantry Division complete
 - 310 Infantry Brigade
 - 311 Infantry Brigade

The following Formations and units which, at the material date were using a "Home Forces" address, adopted a civil (place name) address as from the 1 May 1944:-

48 Division

76 Division

77 Division

80 Division

Basic postage rates applicable as from introduction of the address "A.P.O. England" up to the time of embarkation.

From the public to troops using the address "A.P.O. England";

Letters 1½d for first oz and 1d for each add. oz.

Postcards 1d each

Printed papers
inc. newspapers ½d per 2 oz.

Parcels

Not exceeding	s	d
3 lb		9
7 lb	1	6
11 lb	2	0
22 lb	3	6

Registration fee for

letters and packets 3d
(No registered parcel service available)

Telegrams

Inland rates

Money Order, C.O.D., Express and Insurance Services - not available

From troops using the address "A.P.O. England to civilian addresses in the UK:

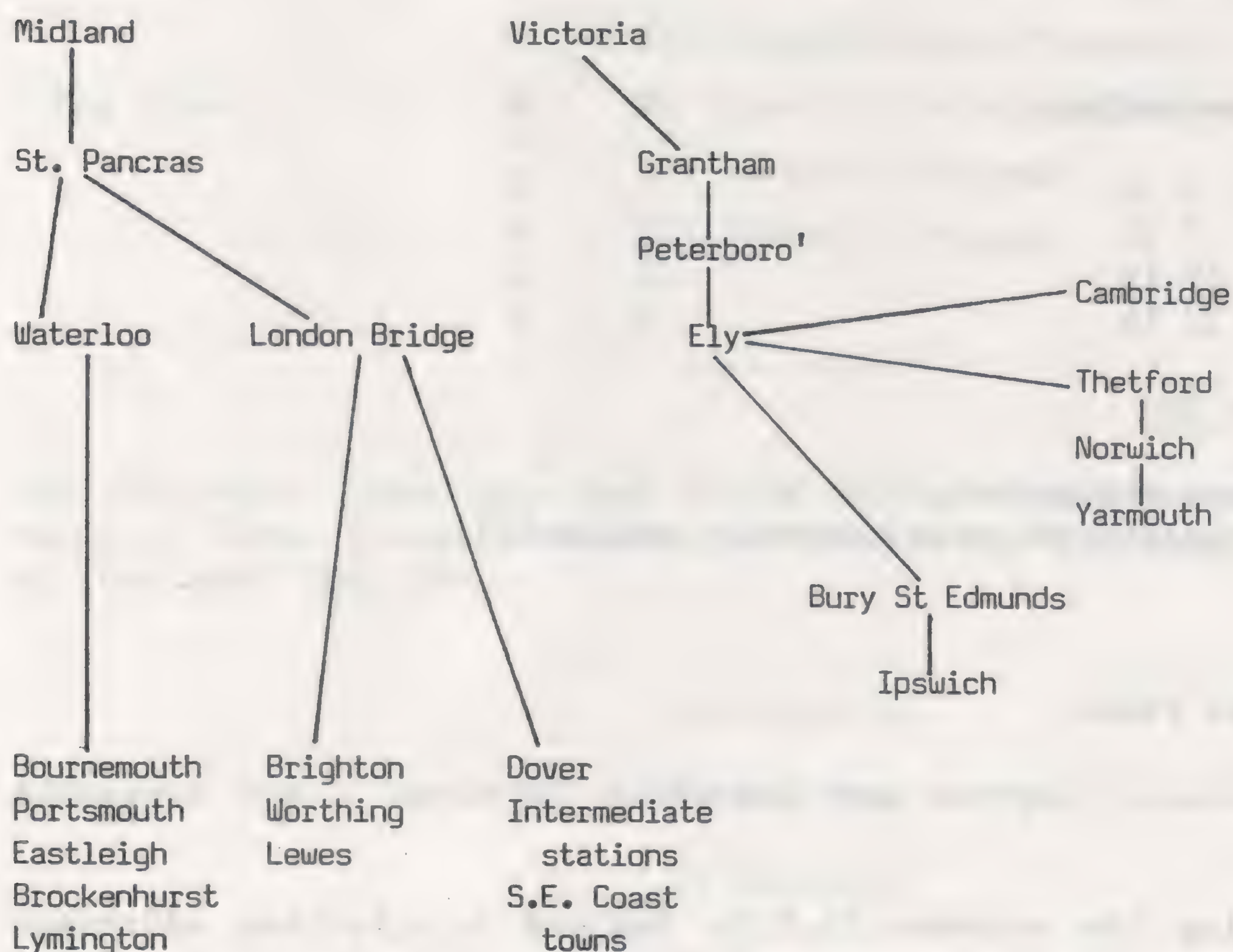
Normal inland services and rates were applicable but telegrams were not accepted at Field Post Offices

Schematic diagram showing how mails were despatched from the Home Postal Centre at Nottingham to the various Army Railheads after introduction of the address "A.P.O. England".

Initial period

Despatches from Nottingham began on the 12th April 1944 and were sent to the various railheads in special vans attached to ordinary express passenger trains. In the following charts the Mon-Fri timings are shown but the services also operated on Saturdays and Sundays at slightly different but comparable times.

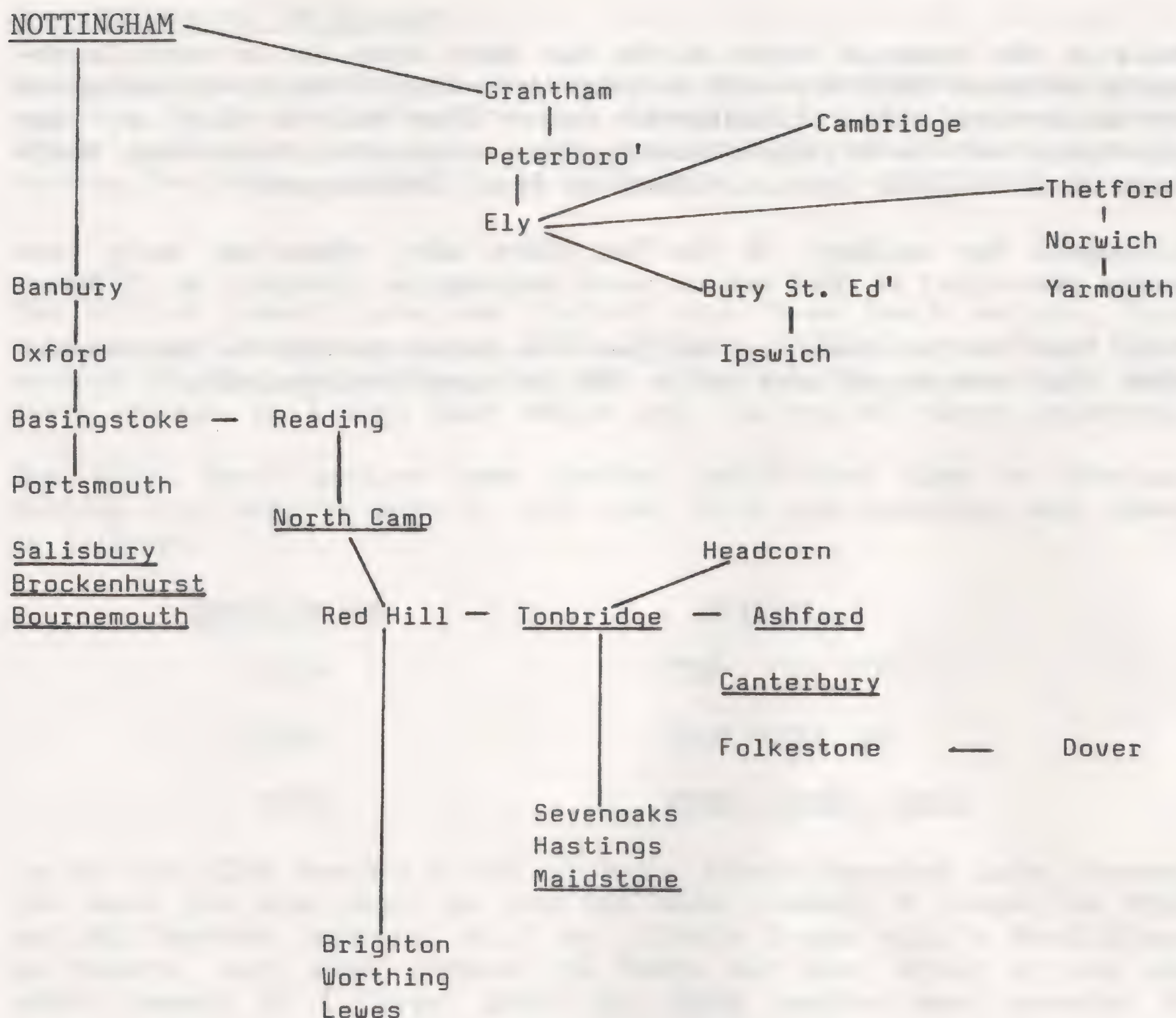
NOTTINGHAM



Later

As the volume of mail built up it was arranged to have a special postal train running from Nottingham to Banbury, Oxford, Basingstoke and Reading with "through" vans for the various destination railheads. The pattern of services was then like this:

cont.... /



Note: Underlining indicates a "through" van. For other destinations "composite" vans were used at the outset but further "through" vans were required as the traffic grew.

The plans for all these services were drawn up by the GPO, Army Postal Services and the then Railway Companies well in advance of the introduction of the "APO England" address. The plans incorporated contingency arrangements for re-routing the main flows of mail in the event of it becoming necessary to divert from the agreed routes. As Formations and units began to move to Concentration and Marshalling Areas, adjustments had to be made to the destinations of the traffic. The flow of traffic to the various destinations in East Anglia began to diminish after a date shortly before D Day, as did also that to inland stations in the south east and south of England until finally the main flow of traffic was from Nottingham to Southampton.

Mails or the invasion force on the far shore were due to reach Southampton at about 0800 hrs each morning. According to local circumstances the mails were either transferred direct from rail to ship or, when this could not be arranged, accommodated temporarily in a Post Mails Depot at BLETCHYNDEN Terrace, Commercial Road, Southampton.

Newspapers for shipment to the far shore were despatched daily from London (Waterloo) at 0240 hrs to reach Southampton (Central) at 0518hrs.

Mails from the far shore were shipped from anchorage GOLD to Southampton where they were handed over to the GPO for onward transmission.

Organisation of the Beaches

For a full understanding of the manner in which the postal organisation unfolded it is desirable first to understand how the beaches, across which the assault took place, were organised for the purpose of maintaining the invasion force in the early days.

* * * * * *

The British assault area was divided into three beach sectors. From west to east these were named GOLD, JUNO and SWORD. Across these three sectors 50 Div, 3 Canadian Div and 3 British Div respectively made their assault on D Day. Each sector had its own off-shore anchorage.

The three beach sectors were further sub-divided down to beaches. Reading from west to east in each case these sub-divisions were named as follows:-

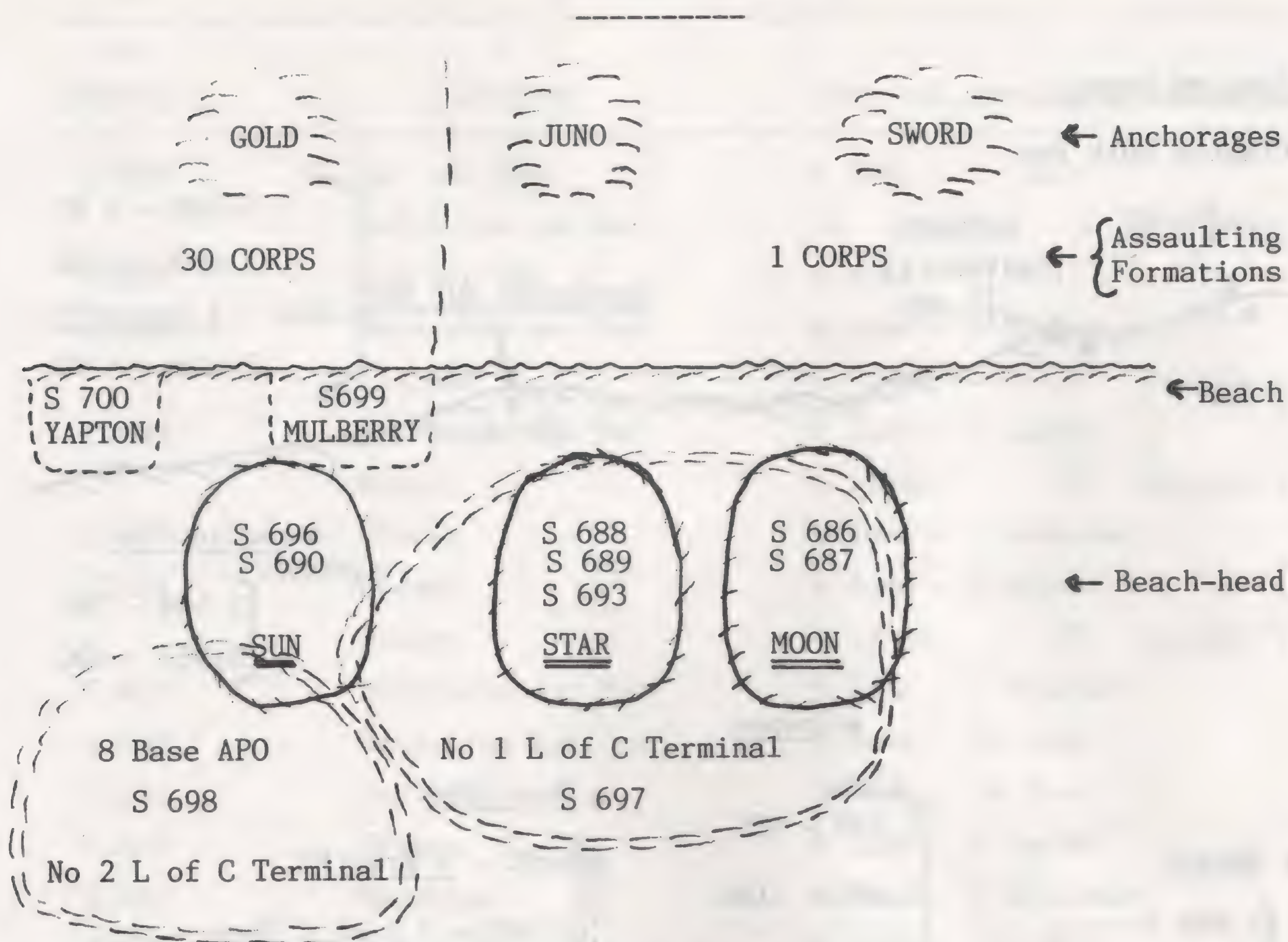
<u>Beach Sector</u>	<u>Beaches</u>
GOLD	ITEM, JIG, KING
JUNO	LOVE, MIKE, NAN
SWORD	PETER, QUEEN, ROGER

On JIG and KING beaches 9 and 10 Beach Groups operated under command 104 Beach Sub Area which in turn was under command 30 Corps. The MIKE and NAN beaches, operated by 7 and 8 Beach Groups with 4 Beach Group in reserve, were under command 102 Beach Sub Area, which in turn was under command of 1 Corps. QUEEN and ROGER beaches were operated by 5 and 6 Beach Groups under command 101 Beach Sub Area, in turn under command 1 Corps.

As supplies of ammunition, petrol, food, and so on were brought in they were put down in dumps on the beaches and, from the dumps so formed Beach Maintenance Areas with various supply depots developed. These Beach Maintenance Areas (BMAs) were code-named SUN in the Gold Sector, STAR in the JUNO sector, and MOON in the Sword sector. One of the Depots in each BMA - that for food and general supplies was known as a Detailed Issue Depot (DID). It was alongside these DIDs that, initially, the Field Post Offices serving the assault Divisions were established. From D Day to D +4 maintenance of the Forces ashore was from these BMA depots - postal working outwards from SUN, STAR and MOON. From about D +5 on, HQ 11 L of C Area took over control of the Beach Sub Areas. The depots in the BMAs were expanded into two L of C terminals (later called Army Roadheads) superseding the SUN, STAR and MOON areas. At a later stage a Rear Maintenance Area was formed in advance of the L of C terminals which were then "eaten down".

The appendix which follows - Appendix H1 - shows, in diagrammatic form how the stationary Army Post Offices - the "S" Offices - were planned to be established in the beachhead in the early stages, and how they were actually established. The plan provided that these "S" offices would form anchor points in the postal distribution chain. The forward formations were planned to be, and were in actual fact, hung onto these points as was most expedient.

Diagram showing the planned positioning of the Army Post Offices ("S" Offices) in relation to the Beach Maintenance Areas



Following is a list of the "S" Offices which were planned to open in the early stages of the operation:

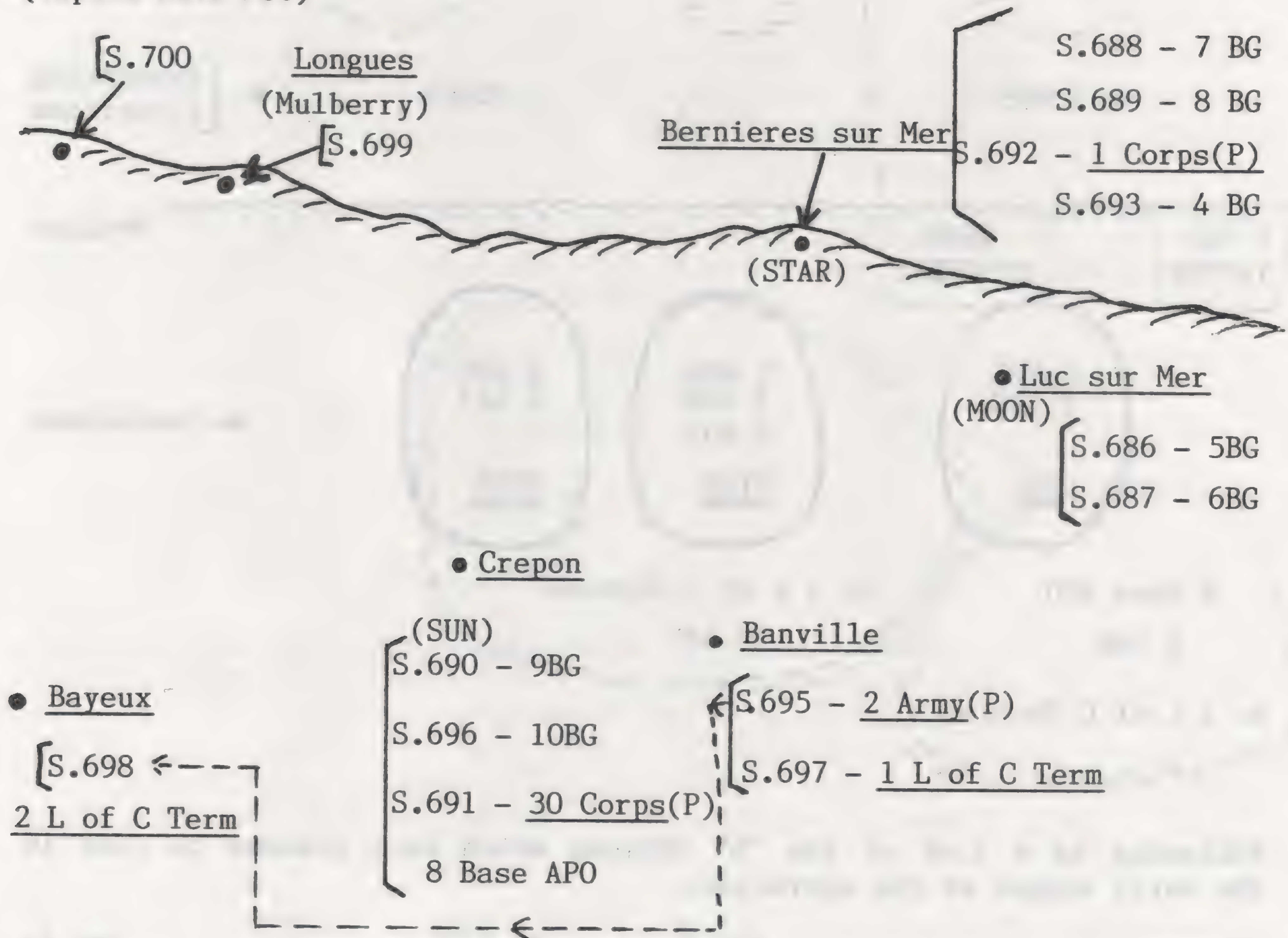
<u>Location</u>		<u>APO No</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>APO No</u>
2 Army (Phantom)	-	S.695*	Yapton (Bulk petrol)	- S.700
1 Corps (Phantom)	-	S.692	Mulberry Area	- S.699
30 Corps (Phantom)	-	S.691	Nr DID, 5 Beach Gp	- S.686
1 L of C Terminal	-	S.697	Nr DID, 6 Beach Gp	- S.687
2 L of C Terminal	-	S.698	Nr DID, 7 Beach Gp	- S.688
Nr DID, 8 Beach Gp	-	S.689	4 Beach Gp	- S.693
Nr DID, 9 Beach Gp	-	S.690		
Nr DID, 10 Beach Gp	-	S.696		

*S 695 was to be opened initially as a phantom on S.697:
it later became a phantom on S.698

The following diagram shows the actual positioning of the Army Post Offices ("S" Offices) on the ground in the beach-head

Port en Bessin

(Yapton Bulk Pet)



Statement showing dates of opening and closing, with locations, of "S" Offices, and Base APOs, in operation between 6th June and 31st December 1944

1	2	3
Office	Location	Dates of opening and closing
S.686	Luc sur Mer	6 June - 11 July
	Bernieres sur Mer	11 July - 15 September
S.687	Luc sur Mer	6 June - 31 July
S.688	Bernieres sur Mer	6 June - 1 August
	Lisieux	4 Sept - (31 December)
S.689	Bernieres sur Mer	6 June - 1 August
	Rouen	4 Sept - (31 December)
S.690	Crepon	6 June - 3 November
S.691	Crepon	6 June - 3 August
	Dieppe	4 Sept - (31 December)
S.692	Bernieres sur Mer	6 June - 2 October
S.693	Bernieres sur Mer	6 June - 31 July
S.695	Banville	6 June - 24 June
S.696	Crepon	6 June - 3 August
S.697	Banville	6 June - 6 September
S.698	Banville	6 June - 24 June
	Bayeux	24 June - (31 December)
S.699	Longues	6 June - 5 September
S.700	Port en Bessin	6 June - 2 October
		31 Oct - (31 December)
S.676	Brix	19 July - 8 November
S.702	Falaise	22 August - 2 September
S.677	St Loup Hors	26 August - 18 September
S.678	Epine	26 August - 2 October
S.711	Caen	5 August - (31 December)
S.712	Amiens	4 September - (31 December)
S.703	Evreux	12 September - 1 November
S.714	Lille	13 September - (31 December)

Appendix H2 (cont)

1	2	3
S.715	Antwerp	13 September - (31 December)
S.717	Brussels	13 September - (31 December)
S.713	Arras	18 September - (31 December)
S.718	Ostend	19 September - (31 December)
S.719	Boulogne	30 September - (31 December)
S.720	Paris	3 October - (31 December)
S.721	Calais	19 November - (31 December)
S.722	Bruges	28 December - (31 December)
S.716	Ghent	28 October - (31 December)
8 Base APO	Crepon	20 June - 26 September
	Antwerp	26 September - (31 December)
X Base APO	Crepon	26 September - 3 November
18 Base APO	Dieppe	18 September - 22 October

Note:

Where the date '31 December' appears in brackets in Col.3 it is simply an indication tha the office was still open in the latest location shown on that date: not that it closed on 31 December.

UK Residues - Parent Formation, Location of Residue and Railhead

Parent Formation	Location of residue	Railhead
1 Corps	Aldershot	Farnborough A P 'Z'
3 Br Division	Aldershot	Farnborough A P 'Y'
3 Cdn Divn	Nil	
51 Br Divn	Bury St Edmunds	Bury St Ed, A P 'Z'
2 Army Troops	Aldershot	Farnborough A P 'W'
30 Corps	Aldershot	Farnborough A P 'V'
50 Divn	Larkhill	Salisbury A P 'Z'
7 Arm'd Divn	Thetford	Thetford A P 'Z'
49 Divn	Gt Yarmouth	Gt Yarmouth A P 'Z'
8 Corps	Crawley	Crawley A P 'Z'
Gds Arm'd Divn	Brighton	Brighton 'Z'
15 Divn	Worthing	Worthing 'Z'
11 Arm'd Divn	Aldershot	Farnborough A P 'T'
31 Tank Bde	Aldershot	Farnborough A P 'S'
8 A.G.R.A.	Aldershot	Farnborough A P 'Q'
34 Tank Bde	Aldershot	Farnborough A P 'P'
12 Corps Tps	Tonbridge	Tonbridge A P 'Z'
43 Divn	Battle	Battle A P 'Z'
53 Divn	Maidstone	Maidstone A P 'Z'
59 Divn	Deal	Deal A P 'Z'
HQ 2 Army	Portsmouth	Portsmouth A P 'Z'

Note : A P = Army Posts

Note: The entries in the third column indicate the manner of labelling of mail bags containing mail for the residues. Thus a bag containing mail for 1 Corps Residue would be labelled "Farnborough Army Posts 'Z'" while one with mail for 3 Br Division Residue would be labelled "Farnborough Army Posts 'Y'". (AP = Army Posts)

Basic postage rates applicable as from arrival of the invasion forces in Normandy.

HOMEWARD

Letters - from the troops to any place in the UK or in the British Empire up to 2 oz - free; other letters at the normal rates

Parcels

Not exceeding 3 lb	-	-s 9d
" " 8 lb	-	1s 6d
" " 11 lb	-	2s -d
" " 22 lb	-	3s 6d

Note: The service for letters was basically a surface mail service. But it was made clear to the troops that, as and when aircraft space became available to transport 1st class mail, this would be done. The same applied to mail from the UK to the troops

Telegrams

Telegrams could be handed in at Field Post Offices but it was made clear that they would be passed to the Base Post Office for transmission to the UK postally and thence to destination by wire. Telegrams so handed in were chargeable at inland rates.

OUTWARD (to the troops)

The same rates were applicable as were applied to letters and parcels sent to troops using the "A.P.O. England" address in the UK - see Appendix E.

Telegrams were acceptable at inland rates but they were first circulated telegraphically to London for censorship and then passed to the APS for postal transit to the unit overseas.

Operation OVERLORD Build-up of Postal Units in the theatre of operations from D Day (June 6) to D +90 (Sept 5, 1944)

1	2	3
Day on which a serial of unit or HQ named in Col 2 first landed in France	Unit or HQ	Days on which further serials of unit or HQ landed in theatre
D Day	6 Airborne Div P.U. S.S. Group P.U. 5,6,7,8,9 & 10 Beach Group P.U.s* 50 Div P.U. 1 Corps P.U. 3 GHQ P.U. 8 Arm'd Bde P.U. *Staffed by L of C personnel	D +4 D +1 D +4, 11, & 39 D +1, 7, 42 D +19,52,55,59,69,82 D +10
D +1	3 Div P.U.	D +14, 42
D + 2	51(H) Div P.U.	D +5, 13,39
D +3	2 Army Postal Branch Det 21 A.Gp Postal Branch (attached 2 Army P.B.)	D +4,10,17,24,27,34,36 46,52,67,69
D +4	2 Army P.U. 7 Arm'd Div P.U. 49 Div P.U.	D +25,28 D +7,11,34,62 D +13,14,17,39
D +5	30 Corps P.U.	D +10
D +7	30 Corps Postal HQ 11 Arm'd Div P.U.	D +10 D +13, 34
D +9	8 Base Army Post Office 8 Air Formation P.U.	D +10 D +14, 28
D +10	8 Corps P.U. 8 Corps Postal HQ	D +13, 16, 20
D +12	15(S) Div P.U.	D +13, 42
D +13	43(W) Div P.U. Guards Arm'd Div P.U.	D +21 D +47
D +15	12 Corps Postal HQ 12 Corps P.U. 79 Arm'd Div P.U.	D +48 D +62, 67, 80

D +20	53(W) Div P.U. 59 Div P.U.	D +21 D +23, 47
D +25	13 L of C P.U.	
D +28	34 Tank Bde P.U.	
D +29	6 Guards Tank Bde P.U.	
D +33	HQ L of C Postal Branch	
D +35	1 A.A. Searchlight P.U. 16 L of C P.U.	
D +52	5 Air Formation P.U.	D +74, 79
D +72	1 Airborne Div P.U.	D +88
D +90	52(L) Div. P.U.	

Explanatory notes

- 1) P.U. = Postal Unit
 - 2) S.S. Group = Special Service Group comprising four Commando Brigades
 - 3) The absence of an entry in Col 3 above indicates that the whole of the unit or HQ landed in France on the day shown in Col. 1 e.g. the whole of 8 Corps Postal HQ landed on D +10. 8 Corps Postal Unit on the other hand landed in four separate serials, the first serial on D +10 and the other three on D +13, D +16 and D +20 respectively.
-

Notes on the revision of the sorting arrangements, plans, and "bagging-off" lists planned and introduced in the last three months of 1944.

The revised arrangements for sorting and despatching letter mail posted by troops in the B.L.A. and addressed to destinations in the United Kingdom were based on the following principles:

- a) labelled bundles to be made up for every town of over 20,000 people;
- b) enclosure bags for every town of over 100,000; and
- c) direct despatches for every town with over 150,000 people.

Sorting plans were based on a 72 box Primary with four Secondary Roads as follows:-

Primary	-	London Districts
		Large Cities and towns
		Lancs: County and towns
		Yorks: County and towns
No 1 Road	-	South East and Home Counties
No 2 Road	-	Midlands and East Anglia
No 3 Road	-	South and West of England
No 4 Road	-	North of England: Scotland: Ireland: Wales: Imperial and Foreign

The primary sorting plan was made standard throughout the theatre.

Despatching of mails to the UK was confined to 8 Base APO, Corps, Army, and S.711 (Caen - for the R.M.A.)

Cross-post sorting plans were also revised to provide a selection for the majority of units located postally within the theatre, a 72 box Primary being adopted.

Transfer points for exchange of mail with the Civil Administrations in the liberated territories were standardised as follows:-

Paris (S.720) - for France

Brussels (S.717) for Belgium

and at a later stage,

Eindhoven (S.116) for the liberated areas of Holland.

Notes on the systems of Numerical and Decimal sorting.

NUMERICAL SORTING

The Numerical sorting system introduced initially made use of a 72 box Primary sorting frame. The total numerical range of unit numbers to be handled had, therefore, to be broken down into 72 divisions. This was done in such a way that approximately equal numbers of units would be found in each of the divisions. (It will doubtless be appreciated that there were many more units with early numerical designations - e.g. 2nd Royal Tank Regt, 5th Dorsets, etc - than with higher ones - e.g. 125 Field Coy RE, 789 Transport Coy RASC, etc. So, the dividing up of the total range had to be irregular and each box on the sorting frame had to be labelled with the range of unit numbers which had to be sorted into it. Thus, part of a sorting frame might look like this:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7-9	10-12	13-20
21-27	28-39	40-50	51-60	61-75	76-90	91-99	100-120	121-140

Because the numerical breakdown between boxes was irregular all over the frame, the sorter's hand, whilst moving readily enough to the general area of the frame wanted, tended to hesitate between neighbouring boxes before finally choosing which box to put the letter in. This meant that a fair amount of practice was required before really high sorting speeds were obtained.

DECIMAL SORTING

With this system an 80 box Primary sorting frame was used. The individual boxes were not labelled. Instead, the frame, which had eight horizontal rows, each of ten boxes, had one labelling strip along the top and another down the left hand side. The strip along the top carried the numbers 0,1,2,39. These numbers related to the last digit of the unit numbers to be sorted. The vertical labelling strip on the left of the fitting indicated the row to which any given unit number was to be sorted on the basis of its first digit(s). The '5' box in each row was edged with white paint. So, a Decimal Primary sorting frame looked like this:

cnt../

Side label (First Digit(s))	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Top label (last digit)
0	(g)					(k)					
1-2				(a)							
3-7									(c)		
8-13							(h)				
14-20			(e)								
21-40						(b)					
41-70									(f)		
71-99	(d)										

By making suitable entries on the vertical labelling strip any desired range of numbers could be accommodated. For instance, the numbers 0 to 999 are covered by the entries inserted on the frame shown above. A few examples will perhaps best illustrate how the frame was used. Thus, with the frame shown above, letters addressed as follows would be sorted to the boxes indicated i.e.:

13 Repair and Recovery Section REME to Box (a)
 235 Field Company RE to Box (b)
 38 Field Ambulance RAMC to Box (c)
 720 Light Aid Section REME to Box (d)
 192 Sqdn RAF to Box (e)
 708 A.A. Regt to Box (f)
 HQ.BAOR to Box (g)
 86 General Hospital RAMC to Box (h)
 5 Dorsets to Box (k)

On introduction the Decimal sorting system proved to be an immediate success. After very little practice the sorters were found to be putting letters accurately into the boxes with no more than an occasional glance to 'locate' them horizontally: in other words to 'locate' the last digit. Their attention was concentrated rather on the eight-way split as shown on the vertical side label - and once the right horizontal row had been chosen, putting the letter into the correct box became almost automatic.

Summing up. What the Decimal system really did was to take the irregularity which in the ordinary Numerical system is spread all over the frame, and to concentrate it in the vertical labelling strip, making the rest of the frame absolutely regular.



GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Term/Abbreviation</u>	<u>Definition</u>
AA & QMG	Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General: in a Division, the Officer responsible to the Commander for the administrative and supply services.
ADAPS	Assistant Director of Army Postal Services (Lt.Col)
A/FPO	Army/Field Post Office: the term Field Post Office was usually applied to an office serving a mobile formation, like a Division, while the term APO was more generally applied to a static office serving non-formational units in the main.
AGRA	Army Group Royal Artillery: a group of Royal Artillery units under command of Army HQ
APDC	Army Postal Distribution Centre: these centres were set up in the UK in the post-Dunkirk to D Day period to handle mail addressed "Home Forces".
APO	Army Post Office
APS	Army Postal Service
BAOR	British Army of the Rhine
Beachhead	In the context of OVERLORD the term was used loosely to indicate the limited (lodgement) area seized by the Allied invasion forces on and shortly after D Day
Bridgehead	The area occupied by the Allied Invasion forces prior to the break-out.
BLA	British Liberation Army
BMA	Beach Maintenance Area: the area on and about the Normandy beaches where the supply dumps were established in the very early days of the Allied invasion
BUCO	Build-up Control Organisation: the Movements organisation set up to control the shipping to Normandy of units forming part of the post-D Day 'build-up'

C in C	Commander in Chief
"Closing postal address"	A postal address which excludes reference to a particular locality: typical examples are - "Home Forces", "B.L.A.", "B.A.O.R.", (see also "open address")
Coasters	Stores ships of small tonnage
COD	Cash on Delivery
Concentration Office	In a postal sense, an office on which mail is concentrated for sorting/distribution
COSSAC	Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander
Cross-post	Mail having both its origin and destination within the theatre: for example, mail from Brigade to Division HQ: Division to Division; Corps to Corps; Corps to Army; and so on.
DADAPS	Deputy Assistant Director of Army Postal Services (Major)
DDAPS	Deputy Director of Army Postal Services (Colonel)
DAPS	Director of Army Postal Services (Brig)
DAQMG	Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General (see AA & QMG): in a Division, the Officer responsible to the AA & QMG for supply services, including postal services
Day A	Day of Posting
Day B	Day after posting
Day C	Second day after posting
D Day	Day on which the Allies landed in Normandy.
D +1	Day after D Day
D.I.D.	Detailed Issue Depot
DP	District Postmaster
DUKW	An amphibious military vehicle , i.e. one capable of propelling itself on land or on water.

FPO	Field Post Office
GHQ	General Headquarters
GHQ 2nd Echelon	The Record Office for an overseas theatre of war. Its function was to maintain the documents for every individual in the theatre on the basis of returns sent to it direct by units
"G" Staff	The Operations Staff of a formation Commander
H Hour	The time at which the seaborne assault on the coast of Normandy was due to begin
Location	See Postal Location
L of C	Lines of Communication (the area between the Rear Army Boundary and the coast)
LSI	Landing Ship: Infantry (designed for landing assault troops on a beach)
LST	Landing Ship: Tanks (designed for landing Tanks on a beach)
MGA	Major General: Administration (directly responsible to the Commander in Chief for administrative and supply services)
Movements Staff	A Branch of the 'Q' Staff responsible for the movement of formations and units by rail, road, and sea
Office of Exchange	In postal terms, an office where mails between one country and another are exchanged
OC	Officer Commanding
"Open postal address"	A postal address which includes a place name thus identifying the geographical location of the unit, etc, using it e.g. '729 General Transport Company RASC, Ashford, Kent'; '5th Royal Sussex Regt, Eastbourne, Sussex'.
POW (or 'PW')	Prisoner of War
Postal location	Fundamentally, the A/FPO from which a unit, etc, gets its mail. To take an example, if the 123 Pioneer Coy got its mail from APO S.711, the records of the APS would show its location as 'S.711'

The army sorting offices concerned would know from this that all mail for the 123 Pioneer Coy should be circulated to, or as for APO S.711. (Exceptionally, while in this country, many units got their mail through a civil sorting office and were 'located' postally on an 'Officer in Charge, Sorting Office, (Boxminster)' basis in APS records. Such a location entry indicated that their mail should be circulated to or as for the Sorting Office at (Boxminster)

RASC

Royal Army Service Corps

RCAF

Royal Canadian Air Force

RE

Royal Engineers

RE(PS)

Royal Engineers (Postal Section)

Railhead

In postal terms, the Railway Station to which mail for an A/FPO was sent - that is when rail was the method of transport

Roadhead

The point to which supplies for a formation were consigned if sent by road

RMA

Rear Maintenance Area: the area of Normandy which contained the main supply bases for the British and Canadian Armies up to the time when the Advanced Base was established in Belgium. It was bounded roughly by a line drawn east from Port en Bessin to Luc sur Mer, south to Caen, west to Vaubadon, north to Saon, and north again to Port en Bessin

SHAEF

Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force

"S" Offices

Stationary Army Post Offices - stationary in the sense that they were static or relatively static, as opposed to the mobility which was a characteristic of Field Post Offices with formations like Divisions, Corps, and so on.

TAF

Tactical Air Force: the component of the RAF which acted in direct support of the Army

Two-tier postal service

The service currently operated by the Post Office in the UK whereby the customer decides

what grade of service he requires - first or second class - by prepaying an appropriate amount of postage.

Unit bag A mail bag containing correspondence for one and only one unit - as opposed to a miscellaneous bag containing mail for two or more units.

Chester Wilmer	-	The Struggle for Europe
Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein	-	Normandy to the Baltic
General H. H. H. H.	-	The Battle for Normandy
William McEwen	-	The Battle of D Day
Sir James G. G.	-	A Record Year

The Administrative History of the Army Group

Report of a speech in the House of Commons on 13th March 1945 by the then Secretary of State for War.

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| The Administrative History of 21 Army Group | | |

*Reprint of a speech in the House of Commons on 13th March 1945 by the then Secretary of State for War.

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